



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE RAJAH SOLAIMAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT (RSIM)  
AND THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAMIC CONVERTS IN  
THE PHILIPPINES: A MAJOR SECURITY CONCERN**

by

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June 2008

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CONCERN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rise of radical Islamic converts in the Philippines is one of the major security concerns in the Philippines today. The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) emerged from various “Balik-Islam” (revert to Islam) organizations that advocate for the conversion of the country to Islam on the belief that the Philippines was an Islamic land prior to western colonization. RSIM, which established links with the various terrorist organizations both in the Philippines and in the Middle East, has been responsible for several major terrorist attacks in the country in recent years.

Despite the arrests of several key leaders of RSIM and Philippine counter-terrorism successes against the movement’s objectives, RSIM remains a major security concern in the Philippines due to the continued existence of social, political and economic factors that enable the possibility of RSIM or RSIM-like groups to re-emerge. The Philippine government must address the root causes of the problem in order to reduce the grievances of the people, weaken radical organizational strength, and control the political opportunities that have led to the growth of social movements in the Philippines, including the RSIM radical Islamic converts.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

Just after midnight on February 27, 2004, 3.6 kg of TNT hidden inside a television and put in a box for shipping exploded onboard the *MV Super Ferry 14*. This Philippine registered passenger ship regularly carried hundreds of passengers from Manila to Davao City in the Southern Philippines. The explosion set the passenger ship afire, causing 416 casualties (116 dead, 300 injured) out of its 744 commercial passengers and 155 crewmembers aboard (Chalk, 2006, p. 1).

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) immediately claimed the incident, which is considered one of the worst maritime terrorist attacks in Philippine history. ASG is an Al Qaeda linked Philippine terrorist organization responsible for several high profile terror activities in recent years (ICG Report, 2005, pp. 16-18). Philippine authorities later learned that the ferry incident was a joint operation conducted by elements of the ASG and a lesser-known group of Islamic converts known as the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 9).

Records of the voyage indicate that at 8:00 pm on February 26, 2004, a passenger identified as Arnulfo Alvarado checked in at number 51-B, the A deck of the passenger ship's middle section. Alvarado, who easily blended in with the rest of the passengers, brought with him a large cardboard box as his main luggage. The box contained a hollowed-out television set packed with the improvised explosive device (IED) responsible for the devastation. At 9:00 pm, Alvarado was able to disembark from the ship by claiming he needed to buy some food for the trip. Alvarado never returned, and at 11:00 pm the passenger ship left Manila for its journey to the Southern Philippines. The ship completed 90 minutes of its voyage, sailing along Manila Bay between Corrigidor and El Fraile islands, before the bomb detonated. The explosion damaged the ship and

immediately set it afire, partially sinking it off the coast of Manila Bay. After several days of rescue and recovery operations, 63 bodies were recovered and 53 remained unaccounted for (Chalk, 2006, p. 1).

Philippine authorities pursued leads, and four weeks into their investigation they arrested Arnulfo Alvarado. Alvarado's confession revealed that his real name is Redendo Cain Dellosa. An Islamic convert, Alvarado was one of the original members of the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM), and had been previously arrested in May 2002 at an RSIM training camp in the Northern Philippines. Alvarado claimed that the ferry bombing mission was a joint operation conducted by the ASG and the RSIM based on the guidance from Khadafi Janjalani, the ASG leader (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 9).

The *MV Super Ferry 14* bombing demonstrated an operational link between the Al Qaeda supported ASG and the group of radical Islamic converts who are advocating for the conversion to Islam of the whole Philippines. The RSIM emerged from the "Balik-Islam" (revert to Islam) Movement (BIM) which began in the 1970s and now reportedly has over 200,000 Christian converts to the Islamic faith. Members prefer to be called "reverts" instead of "converts" due to their belief that the Philippines was originally a Muslim country prior to Western colonization in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Banlaoi, 2006, p. 1).<sup>1</sup>

Islamic converts have been conducting terrorist operations in an increasing trend that has garnered the notice of governments since the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Monlatke, 2005, p. 2). Converts often carry out acts of terrorism in areas to which foreign terrorists do not have access. Of the recent terrorist attacks conducted outside of Iraq, most involved Muslim converts. For instance, Germaine Lindsay, a Jamaican-born convert, was one of the four suicide bombers in the July 7, 2005 London bombing (Monlatke, 2005, p. 2). Other incidents include Richard Reid, the "shoe bomber," a mixed-race British

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of the term "revert" is a political one in the sense that it empowers a historical viewpoint that is not shared by the vast majority of Filipinos. For the remainder of this thesis, the term "convert" will be used, except when the term "revert" was chosen by the quoted reference.

citizen who converted to Islam while in prison and tried to detonate explosives hidden in the soles of his shoes; Jose Padilla, an American convert who is still in detention for planning a dirty bomb attack in Chicago (Coleman, 2002, p. 2); and John Walker Lindh, another American convert, who after converting to Islam traveled to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban against Coalition Forces (Bassi, 2006, p. 1).

The Philippines is not a new setting for this general phenomenon. Several Filipino Muslim converts have been involved in major terrorist incidents in recent years. They have emerged from the thousands of Islamic converts who now embrace Islam for various reasons. Since the 1970s, attacks by converts are reportedly more fanatical and dangerous than those experienced by the country at the hands of traditional Muslim terrorists (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1). Converts are frequently more radical in their interpretation of Islam and have a wider sphere of influence, as they can blend easily with the dominant Christian Filipino populace.

Since the 1990s, long-established Muslim radical groups have begun to exploit Islamic converts' ability to conduct operations in both the traditional Muslim areas of the south and in other major Christian dominated cities in the northern and central regions in the Philippines. Major terrorist groups have expanded their abilities to conduct operations because of the converts' ability to blend with the Christian environment, their knowledge of the culture in the Christian areas, and their wider mass base support in non-Muslim areas in the Philippines. Since the discovery of these capabilities in 2002, Philippine authorities have progressively more become concerned with extremist Islamic converts and their alliances with terror networks (Mendoza, 2002, p. 111). However, increased counter-terrorism efforts by Philippine authorities have led to arrests of top leaders of the RSIM, disrupted their networks, and strained their ties with other terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, the Jemaah Islamiah (JI), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Despite the arrests of its key leaders and the disruption of its networks, there are still several vital questions that should be addressed regarding terrorism conducted by Muslim converts in the Philippines. This thesis addresses five key research questions: 1) Do the remnants of RSIM pose a significant threat to the Philippine government?; 2) What is the likelihood that RSIM, or a group similar to it, will emerge in the future?; 3) Do the increasing number of Christians embracing the Islamic faith provide a pool of potential recruits for radical converts that can be used for future terrorist activities by different radical groups?; 4) What role does the overseas worker program play in the Balik Islam phenomena?; 5) If a significant threat exists, what policies should the Philippine government consider adopting to insure its security?

## **B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will provide an analysis of Islamic converts in the Philippines by studying the motivational factors for conversion and the genesis and development of the “Balik-Islam” Movement (BIM). From this point, the paper will analyze how a portion of the organization became radicalized and resorted to the use of terrorism under the name of the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM). The purpose of this research is to examine the emergence of BIM and its related radical group RSIM from a social movement perspective in order to determine whether this is truly a concern for the government of the Philippines and the international community. To this end, this study will consider various factors associated with the growth of the Islamic converts in the Philippines and the radicalization process of members that are co-opted by terrorist organizations. Additionally, it will provide strategic level policy recommendations to the Manila government as it seeks to address the threat of RSIM and the rise of the radical Islamic converts. Lastly, this study will consider the operational and tactical concerns that the government must understand as it addresses this threat.

While there are several issues related to the ideas explored in this thesis (for instance, the Muslim secessionist movement in the Southern Philippines and ongoing peace initiatives), this thesis will limit its scope to the study of the “Balik-Islam” Movements and the rise of Islamic converts in the Philippines. We address the conversion process, social factors in the BIM’s growth, and the BIM’s ideology. We will exclude exhaustive analysis of other terrorist threat groups linked to the RSIM, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Islamiah (JI), and the communist New People’s Army (NPA).

### **C. THESIS METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION**

By using contemporary social movement theory as the basic theoretical framework, this thesis provides a qualitative analysis of the rise of the “Balik-Islam” Movement (BIM) and its radical group, the RSIM. Using government reports, news articles, related studies made by security experts, interviews, and other related materials as data, the study will present an analysis of the different social factors contributing to the rise of Islamic converts in the Philippines and provide recommendations as to how the government can address the threat from radical Islamic converts.

Chapter I provides the necessary background on the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) as one of the major terrorist groups in the Philippines. This opening chapter further details information on one of the most violent terrorist acts perpetrated by the group in recent years—the MV Super Ferry 14 bombing. Chapter I also discusses the scope and purpose of the research, its limitations, and the thesis organization.

Chapter II discusses the related literature: the Political Process model developed by Doug McAdam and the historical background relevant to the increasing conflict between Islamic radicalism and Christian Muslims in the Philippines. Chapter III begins by discussing the Balik-Islam Movement and its growth, and then focuses on the splinter group of the Rajah Solaiman Islamic

Movement (RSIM), including its history, organization, background, leadership, linkages, funding, and ideology. This chapter further highlights the process of conversion through an examination of the RSIM founder and leader Ahmed Santos, as well as the group's links with different threat organizations in the Philippines and the Middle East. In order to provide a clearer view of the RSIM's recruitment, this thesis discusses the critical role played by the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) program in the Middle East.

Chapter IV reviews the factors still present within RSIM to determine whether it remains a threat or a potential threat in the Philippine security environment. Using the Political Process model, the chapter discusses how various expanding political opportunities, organizational strength, and insurgents' consciousness have led to the growth of the Islamic converts.

Chapter V summarizes our conclusions and provides policy recommendations addressing the potential threats that emerge from radical groups embedded among Islamic converts in the Philippines. The thesis attempts to offer realistic and attainable policy recommendations based on the existing national policy and strategic programs of the Philippine government in its overall national security strategy.

## **II. THEORETICAL APPROACH FOR ANALYSIS**

For our analysis, we draw on the Political Process model, which has its roots in the work of Charles Tilly, but was ultimately developed by Doug McAdam in his 1982 work "Political Process and Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970" (McAdam, 1982). Christian Smith's summary of McAdam's work and methodology will also guide our discussion of the Political Process model, as it will be used in our analysis (Smith, 1991, pp. 51-67).

### **A. POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL**

The Political Process model specifies three key variables in the emergence and life-course of social movements: (1) the relative availability of political opportunities in the broad political environment; (2) the relative strength of related organizations that can help facilitate a social movement; and (3) the collective realization that social change is both imperative and viable (McAdam, 1982, p. 58).

#### **1. Expanding Political Opportunities**

Minority populations, for the most part, face numerous challenges to affecting change within a society. Moreover, opportunities for movements to overcome such challenges are rare and fluctuate over time. According to the Political Process model, only when these so-called opportunities expand to a significant degree can budding social movements have any hope of mobilizing successfully. Factors leading to the expansion of opportunities relate to everything from globalization to government repression. As McAdam (1982) explains:

Any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities. Among the events and processes likely to prove disruptive of the political status quo are wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic changes. (p. 41)

These political opportunities can manifest themselves in three broad forms: (1) political instability, (2) enhanced political positions of the aggrieved populations, or (3) ideological openness (McAdam, 1982, p. 42).

Political instability occurs when the control of the existing power structure weakens. In order to maintain the status quo, dominant groups must expend their political capital and resources to counter movements which are attempting to exploit the instability (McAdam, 1982, p. 42). Short duration events, such as economic crisis, armed conflict, and traumatic world events (war, pestilence, drought, tsunami, earthquake, etc), can rattle the existing political structure and raise the possibility of policy reforms that benefit aggrieved populations as they seek to maintain stability for the dominant group (Smith, 1991, p. 59).

An increase in the political position (i.e., power) of aggrieved populations can result from broad social changes that occur over extended periods of time. Successful insurgencies typically do not emerge merely because of widespread political instability, but also because of broad social processes that have strengthened the aggrieved population's political power (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977, p. 266). "Consequently, the increase in political opportunity through enhanced political positions for movement groups is usually achieved more gradually than through political instability" (Smith, 1991, p. 59).

Smith extends McAdam's model to include ideological openness as a third factor by which political opportunities can expand. Broad social changes may lead the social environment to tolerate alternative, critical, and even subversive ideas and worldviews espoused by the aggrieved population and other associated movements (McAdam, 1982, p. 43). "Since the exercise of power is



often closely linked to the manipulation of ideas, the expansion of freedom of thought and expression combined with an influx of creative, critical ideas may result in a marked increase in political opportunity for potential movement groups” (Smith, 1991, p. 59).

All three of these factors can expand the political opportunities available to aggrieved populations and provide a means for them to increase their relative power within a society. Nevertheless, in themselves, these favorable environmental changes only increase the probability that budding insurgent movements will be able to mobilize successfully. Whether they actually do so or not depends on two other factors: an increase in indigenous organizational strength and the development of an insurgent consciousness (Smith, 1991, p. 59).

## **2. Organizational Strength**

As noted above, expanding political opportunities are not enough to engender the birth of a social movement. To successfully mobilize, activists also need access to the resources necessary to mobilize and sustain their cause. As McAdam explains: “A conducive political environment only affords the aggrieved population the opportunity for successful insurgent action. It is the resources of the minority community that enable insurgent groups to exploit these opportunities” (McAdam, 1982, p. 43). Resources include things such as the increased education and wealth within the aggrieved population or access to the wealth of sympathetic (and often international) supporters. Nevertheless, McAdam argues that the most important resource available to insurgent groups are strong, indigenous organizations because they are able contribute five key resources to a social movement: members, leaders, solidary incentives, communication networks and enterprise tools. We discuss each of these in turn.

**a.     *Members***

Individuals do not automatically band themselves into social movements. Rather, isolated individuals often move towards familiar organizations and settings that allow them to interact with other individuals who share similar grievances (Sageman, 2004, p. 63). McAdam (1982) argues that “the more interaction individuals have within an aggrieved community, the easier it is for them to be recruited and mobilized” (McAdam, 1982, p. 44). “No matter how a typical participant describes his reasons for joining the movement, or what motives may be suggested by a social scientist on the basis of deprivation, disorganization, or deviancy models, it is clear that the original decision to join required some contact with the movement” (Gerlach & Hine, 1970, p. 79). Movements generally recruit individuals in one of two ways: (1) through existing ties that the individuals have with organizations that are linked to the movement, or through what Oberschall, (1973) describes as “bloc recruitment”, in which the movement arises out of the merger of various groups already existing within the aggrieved population (p. 125).

**b.     *Leaders***

Leadership proves another vital factor in a movement's ability to succeed and operate. Insurgency leaders provide the guidance and organizational direction needed to focus the movement's energies towards its objective (McAdam, 1982, p. 47). As Smith (1991) notes, “Since leadership skills are typically cultivated over time through experience, existing organizations often serve the function of a training ground for social movement leaders” (p. 60). Once an individual has established credibility within the aggrieved population, the leader is often one of the first members to join an emerging organization due to their status within the community (McAdam, 1982, p. 47). Such leaders often serve as examples for like-minded individuals within the aggrieved population, which in turn results in the movement's increased ability to recruit, fundraise, and network.

### **c. *Established Incentives***

Since movements have roots in existing organizations, they are often able to utilize the “established structures of solidary incentives” that existing organizations have created in order to function effectively. McAdam (1982) describes “solidary incentives” as:

a myriad of interpersonal rewards that provide the motive force for participation in these groups. It is the salience of these rewards that helps explain why recruitment through established organizations is generally so efficient. (p. 45)

The ability of movements to draw on existing solidary incentives helps them to overcome the “free rider problem,” the phenomenon that movements often face when attempting to recruit individuals for action that may require sacrifice on their part when they would be able to reap the rewards of any successes achieved by the movements whether they participated or not (Smith, 1991, p. 60). Drawing on the solidary incentives of existing organizations simply allows potential members to transfer their membership and efforts from an organization to which they are already committed to a movement with more focused objectives. McAdam (1982) writes:

These organizations already rest on a solid structure of solidary incentives that insurgents have, in effect, appropriated by defining movement participation as synonymous with organizational membership. Accordingly, the myriad of incentives that have heretofore served as the motive force for participation in the group are now simply transferred to the movement. Thus, insurgents have been spared the difficult task of inducing participation through the provision of new incentives of either a solidary or material nature. (p. 47)

### **d. *Communication Networks***

Since “a social movement is a new cultural item subject to the same pattern of diffusion and adoption as other innovations” (McAdam, 1982, p. 47), the ability for movements to effectively communicate among members is

crucial for their ability to mobilize. When movements utilize existing organizations as their foundation for recruitment, the existing formal and informal communication infrastructure is co-opted as members realign their allegiances (McAdam, 1982, pp. 46-47 and Freeman, 1973). "The inter-organizational linkages characteristic of established groups facilitate movement emergence by providing the means of communication by which the movement, as a new cultural item, can be disseminated throughout the aggrieved population" (McAdam, 1982, p. 47).

**e. *Enterprise Tools***

Emerging movements inevitably face constraints such as shortages in materials, funds, and infrastructure that hinder their ability to operate effectively. In order to overcome these constraints, movements often exploit preexisting systems made available through the government or rely on their connections with other organizations, communities, or sympathizers. Furthermore, globalization has empowered movements that formerly would have suffered under such obstacles by enabling them access to a wide variety of communication tools (cell phones, email, websites, and media exposure).

While expanding political opportunities and increases in indigenous organizational strength are necessary factors in the emergence of social movements, together they are insufficient for a movement to get off the ground (McAdam, 1982, p. 48). The development of a third factor, namely an insurgent consciousness, is also necessary.

**3. *Insurgent Consciousness***

People who feel contentment with the current political and social climate are unlikely to form or participate in a movement to bring about social change. Rather, a social movement draws people who are unhappy with the status quo. Nevertheless, discontent by itself does not produce social movements; there needs to be a transformation of consciousness. People must recognize that they share these grievances with others and believe that they can do something about

them. Put simply, people must experience some sort of cognitive realization that change is not only necessary, but also possible. Christian Smith (1991) calls this transformation the development of an insurgent consciousness, which is a “collective state of understanding” (p. 61) that perceives, interprets, and explains a social situation in such a way that it compels people to organize and act in order to change the social situation.

Before using social movement theory as the broad frame of reference to present our analysis in chapter four, we now turn to a brief historical presentation of the “Balik Islam” Movement (BIM) in the Philippines.

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### **III. EMERGENCE OF A RADICAL “BALIK-ISLAM” MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF RAJAH SOLAIMAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT (RSIM)**

After the September 11, 2001 incident, a renewed global focus on international terrorism exposed an emerging trend. A new group of individuals who have converted to Islam are actively contributing to terrorist acts throughout the world. These people, who were raised in the Christian (or another) faith in their own country, have found themselves embracing Islam, and are now willing to sacrifice their lives for their new cause. “Converts to Islam have been involved in virtually every major Al Qaeda-inspired cell uncovered in Europe since the September 2001 attacks in the US” (Contenta, 2006, p. 1).

The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) has emerged from the ranks of different organizations within the “Balik-Islam” Movement (BIM) as part of this new trend. Although the BIM greatly influenced the creation of RSIM, the latter group represents only a very small portion of BIM members. Considered more radical in their views, RSIM has ties with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the regional terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and receives funding from international terrorist groups. For this reason, some Philippine security experts consider RSIM to be one of the most serious threats developing in the Philippines (NICA Report, 2007, p. 2).

#### **A. THE “BALIK-ISLAM” MOVEMENT (BIM)**

The “Balik-Islam” (revert to Islam) Movement (BIM) is one of the fastest growing social movements in the Philippines today (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2). Muslim fundamentalism and extremism in the Philippines had been growing steadily in the past few years, mainly due to the international trend in Islamic revivalism in the Middle East and in other Muslim countries (Mendoza, 2005). BIM is a loose conglomeration of Filipino Christian converts to the Islamic faith who believe that the Philippines was a Muslim country prior to western colonization and that all Filipinos need to revert back to their original faith (Undog, 2005, p. 3).

“Balik Islam” thus refers to various groups of converts who advocate the return of the Philippines to the Islam. “There is no pattern on the state of mind, educational background, and social status of people converted to Islam. However, some of the factors that attracted them include employment, quest for purity and abhorrence to materialism, and perceived immorality of secular society” (Agustin, 2005, p. 6). Dr. Luis Lacar, a professor at the Mindanao State University (MSU) in the Southern Philippines, describes BIM as “a movement of individuals who made a paradigm shift in their ordered view of life from one perspective to another” (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2). In his study *“Balik-Islam: Christian Converts to Islam in the Philippines*, Lacar (2003) notes that “it was the strong feeling of insecurity that made them decide to convert” (Special Report, pcij.org, p. 1). He also notes, “The converts, finding security in their newfound religion, became zealous defenders of Islam” (p. 1).

## **1. Historical Background**

The Philippines is a predominantly Christian country with a small Muslim population. Approximately 83 percent of the population is Catholic, while about five percent is Muslim, most living on the southern island of Mindanao (Country Profile, 2006, p. 9). Christianity was introduced to the Philippines by Spanish colonizers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. With the exception of the Moro people in the southern region, who continued to pursue their own beliefs, identity and culture, a majority of the population adopted Christianity as the religion of choice.

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, Muslim traders arrived in Sulu Archipelago as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century and established the Sultanate of Sulu in 1450; the Islam faith was accordingly spread throughout pockets within the Southern Philippines (Banlaoi, 2006, p. 2). By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim traders and missionaries established settlements in the southern region by marrying local women and converting the local people to Islam (Undog, 2005,



p. 1). Professor Rommel Banlaoi (2006) argues that, “were not for the Spanish colonial rule... the Philippines would have been a Muslim country, much like its Southeast Asian neighbors” (p. 2).

As a result of educational experiences within a broader international community, young Filipino Muslims have increasingly gained awareness of the trends and developments in the Muslim faith. During the 1970s, Arab petrodollars provided scholarship grants to young Filipino Muslims at numerous universities in the Middle East similar to the Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Upon their return to the Philippines, these new missionaries became dedicated to establishing Islamic schools and propagating Islam throughout the different regions of the country (Undog, 2005, p. 1).

Conversion to Islam has occurred within the Philippines for centuries. During the Spanish era, Filipino Christians converted to the Islamic faith because of inter-marriage, or for personal or economic reasons. An early noteworthy example occurred in 1842. Pedro Cuevas escaped from authorities in Cavite, Southern Luzon, and settled on the island of Basilan in the Southern Philippines. While there, Cuevas fought and killed a local chieftain in the area; in order to be accepted by the local tribe, he converted to Islam and adopted the name Datu Kalun. He later married a local woman and led the natives against invaders and pirates in Basilan and Jolo (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1).

Contemporary conversion to Islam peaked in the 1970s, during the height of the Moro uprising against the Philippine government. “Out of fear for their lives and their family’s security, Christian settlers in Mindanao were forced to convert to Islam” (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1). Aside from this, inter-marriage between Christian settlers and Muslims has been another leading contributor to conversions. These marriages resulted in the mixed-ethnicity offspring (“mestizo”) who later became urban migrants entering universities, government or civil society sectors, and who now occupy key positions in society (ICG Report, 2005, p. 3).

One of the most significant factors contributing to the rise of radical Islamic converts in the Philippines is the “*Tabligh*” missionaries. The movement became very active in the Philippines during the 1980s when foreign Islamists from Pakistan, Libya and Egypt arrived in Mindanao and taught radical Islam (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1). Aminkadra Undog (2005) notes, “The first documented activity of ‘Balik-Islam’ which has contributed to the prominence of the BIM is that of Hadji Akmad del Rio, an Ilocano who migrated to General Santos in Mindanao” (p. 3). After his conversion to Islam in 1981, Akmad del Rio organized a movement that solicited funds from Middle Eastern organizations such as the Saudi Arabian Islamic Missionary Council (Undog, 2005, p. 3).

However, the biggest contributors in the number of Islamic converts in the Philippines are the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW). Since the 1970’s, these workers have been exposed to the teachings of Islam while working in several Middle East countries. The OFW feels drawn to the Islam faith for a variety of reasons: a desire for job security or community, boredom, loneliness, or simple faith (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1). The influx of Filipino OFWs began when Middle Eastern countries experienced an economic boost as a result of dramatically rising oil prices. In 1974, Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos enacted a new labor code that allowed a massive increase in the number of Filipino workers permitted to work in the Middle East. By the end of 2001, there were 915,239 Filipinos in Saudi Arabia and 1.5 million OFW throughout the Middle East (ICG Report, 2005, p. 4). In 2003, the Middle East continued to be the top destination for land-based Filipino Contract workers, accounting for 32% of the total number of OFW (Briefing, Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2006).

As their contracts ended in the Middle East, these OFW returned to the Philippines and formed numerous organizations that propagated the Islamic teachings to which they had been exposed. They received funding from organizations in the Middle East and established their own Islamic schools in traditionally Christian dominated areas. These organizations form the core of what is known today as the “Balik-Islam” (revert to Islam) Movement (BIM).

## **2. Profile of an Islamic “Revert”**

Aminkadra Undog (2005) remarks that a Filipino convert has “no discernible pattern on their state of mind, educational background and social status” (p. 4). These socially normal Filipino individuals are regular features of local public places, schools, markets, government offices, and other sectors of the Philippine society. They represent people from across the different strata of the Philippine social system. Chief Superintendent Rodolfo “Boogie” Mendoza<sup>2</sup> of the Philippine National Police (PNP) traces the roots of Filipino conversion to poverty, social disappointments, and the perceived failures of the government to deliver basic services to the people (Undog, 2005, p. 4); in search of a better life, Filipinos have resorted to religion as an emotional and psychological outlet. Mendoza argues, “Filipinos are fond of searching for new horizons and are naturally very religious.... they turn to religion to escape the disappointments of this life” (Villaviray, 2003, p. 1).

However, even the middle class and highly educated Filipinos may convert to Islam. Abdullah Yusuf Abu Bakr Ledesma, the spokesman of the Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC) who holds a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States, stated, “I became a Muslim because Roman Catholicism has been hijacked by the west...I believe that unlike in other religions, there is no mystery in Islam, only pure logic” (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 1). Known as Joey Ledesma before his conversion to Islam, he is a member of an elite family in Manila and teaches economics at De La Salle University, one of the leading universities in the Philippines. His uncle is an ambassador and has a wide connection in Manila’s wealthy society. Nevertheless, he still chose to convert to Islam (Villaviray, 2003, p. 3).

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<sup>2</sup> Within the Philippine law enforcement community, General Mendoza is the leading authority on the RSIM. He was credited with uncovering the group’s existence, and he provided leadership and direction during the 2002 investigation and arrest of RSIM members.

Today, there is no precise headcount of BIM membership numbers. Based on the article published in the ISN Security Watch entitled *Suicide Terrorism in the Philippines*, the “Balik-Islam Movement’ is a legitimate organization of at least 200,000 Christian converts to the Islamic faith” (Banlaoi, 2008, p. 1). On the other hand, the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) reports that more than 110,000 Filipinos have converted to Islam as of the first quarter of 2005. Among the most prominent “Balik-Islam” front organizations are the Fi Sabilillah Dawah and Media Foundation, the Islamic Studies for Call and Guidance (ISCAG), the Islamic Information Center (IIC) and the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide (IWW) (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003, p. 2). Banlaoi (2007) notes that “the Islamic Information Center (IIC) claims to have been reverting three to five Filipinos everyday” (p. 2). He further notes that most of the conversions are conducted in Islamic schools (*madrassa*) and other organizations such as the Fi Sabillilah Dawah and Media Center, which claims that they are reverting two to three persons daily (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2).

## **B. THE RAJAH SOLAIMAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT (RSIM)**

### **1. The Origin and Development of the RSIM**

The Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) is a radical Islamic group that was first uncovered in 2002 after police executed a series of operations in the province of Pangasinan, located on the main island of Luzon. The RSIM evolved from the creation of the Jihad Fi Sabilillah (JFS) in 1995, which calls for the propagation of jihad and the conversion of the entire Philippines to Islam. The JFS later adopted the name Fi-Sabilillah Da’wah and Media Foundation Incorporated (FSDMFI) (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 1).

The FSDMFI preaches Islamic purification to the “Balik-Islam” community through a radio program aired over the DWBL radio station every Saturday. The organization has also used film clips showing Muslim oppressions in different

parts of the world to agitate its audience. Its primary objective is to propagate “the true essence of Islam and to correct the misconception about Islam and Muslims” (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 4).

Prior to the discovery of the RSIM in 2002, concerns that Islamic converts in the country were already active in terrorism were realized. As early as 1988, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) founder Abdurajak Janjalani met a Muslim convert who became a Muslim scholar. Jovenal Bruno, who studied in Libya, joined the ASG, and was responsible in the establishment of Middle Eastern networks for the Abu Sayyaf. In 1995, Bruno and Khadafi Janjalani (the younger brother of the ASG founder) were captured by Philippine military, but escaped from detention a year later. While in detention, he wrote “Moro Fundamentalism”, a paper “which places emphasis on the appropriate response of the government on radical Islamic revivalism in Mindanao” (Mendoza, 2005, p. 4). The ASG eventually killed Bruno in 1998, suspecting him to be working as a government agent. Jovenal Bruno’s rank and contribution to the Abu Sayyaf Group was noteworthy for converts, as it was the first time a “‘Balik-Islam’ individual held a vital position in a known terrorist group” (Mendoza, 2005, p. 9).

Rommel Banlaoi (2007) believes that the idea of organizing the RSIM was “conceptualized in FSDMFI Office at Cubao, Quezon City during 2000 and 2001 in order to have a legitimate organization”, and that the “core members of the FSDMFI were the individuals who formed the core membership of the RSIM” (p. 4). Banlaoi further notes that “it was Chief Superintendent Rodolfo Mendoza PNP, who says that the name Rajah Solaiman Movement was initially suggested by Ahmed Santos as a joke but it was eventually adopted. The RSIM was also inspired by the Rajah Solaiman mosque in Binangonan, Rizal in Southern Luzon” (p. 5).

The RSIM founders established the group in honor of Rajah Solaiman, a Filipino Muslim ruler of Manila before the Spanish conquest in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Solaiman was reportedly a grandson of the Sultan of Brunei and a scion of the Bornean dynasty (ICG Report, 2005, p. 3). However, in his article *Radical Muslim*

*Terrorism in the Philippines*, Rommel Banlaoi (2006) points out (ironically), “Based on historical records, Rajah Solaiman was a Spanish collaborator during the Spanish period, unlike his other Muslim brothers in the Southern Philippines. Thus, organizing a Muslim liberation movement in his honor is an apparent contradiction” (p. 17). Santos and Lavilla originally called the group, “Harakat,” which means “The Movement” (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 5).

As early as December 2001, Philippine police were receiving reports on a new group of individuals conducting meetings in a remote village of Mal-Ong, in the town of Anda in the Pangasinan province in the Northern Philippines. Follow up police operations revealed a presence of a *madrasah* (an Islamic school), which operated as a training area for radical Islamic teachings as well as an evening meeting place for members (Mendoza, 2005, pp. 6-7).

On May 1, 2002, a shooting incident occurred in the village of San Nicolas in Tarlac City between Philippine National Police (PNP) elements and two armed men who police later identified as Islamic converts. Police killed one of them, Khalid Trinidad, and captured the other, Dexter Payumo. Payumo confirmed the presence of a training camp for militant Islamic converts on privately owned land in Anda, Pangasinan (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 5). Based on information provided by Payumo, Philippine authorities raided the compound on May 2002, arresting six people and recovering firearms, training and bomb making materials and documents directly linking the group to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) (Mendoza, 2002, p. 113). This information allowed police to conduct follow-up operations that would later reveal the existence of the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) (Mendoza, 2002, p. 116).

## **2. Ideological Foundation**

The rise of groups like the RSIM traces its genesis back to the height of the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao in the 1970s. The peak of the Bangsa Moro uprising led by Nur Misuari of the MNLF provided the political and the social conditions for the emergence of the “Balik-Islam” Movement (BIM), not only in

Mindanao but in Christian areas in the Philippines (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 3). Dr. Luis Lacar, a professor at the Mindanao State University (MSU), describes Balik-Islam as “movements of individuals who have made a paradigm shift ...from one perspective to another” (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2). The experience of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) in the Middle East during the 1970s, the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East, and the exposure of Filipinos in several conflicts in Muslim countries inspired a group of radical converts to use violence in the advancement of their cause. Mendoza describes them as the “different generations of Muslim radicals” and the rise of the RSIM as the “third generation of Muslim radicals in the Philippines” (Mendoza, personal communication, April 3, 2008).

Radicals founded the RSIM in 2001 with the main objective of converting the whole of the Philippines to Islam. The goal of the movement is initially to establish an Islamic city in Luzon in which Muslims can enforce the strict implementation of the Islamic law or *Shariah*. The RSIM adheres to the same principles of the Darusallam Abubakar concept pursued by the MILF as envisioned by Salamat Hashim, the founder and former Chairman of the MILF (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 1).

The ideological foundation of the RSIM is based on the “Balik-Islam” Movement claim that the whole Philippines was once a Muslim country before the Spanish colonization. Mendoza (2005) argues, “The mission of the present day fundamentalists and extremists is to revert Christian Filipinos into what they claim to be the original religion....” (p. 1). These BIM groups claim that historical evidence confirms this belief because even before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao was established between the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (ICG Report, 2005, p. 3).

After the series of recent arrests of RSIM leaders, there is a reported split in the ideological direction of the RSIM. Santos, who belonged to the “Islamist faction,” aligned with the ASG and the JI, while Mike Abrera, a former NPA member, heads the “nationalist faction” through the National Alliance of Balik-

Islam (NABI) (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 10). Mendoza notes that “the RSIM is the interplay of nationalist movement and fundamentalist”. There were socialist democrats who joined the BIM through the Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC), which is considered the “nationalist Balik-Islam” (Mendoza, personal communication, April 3, 2008).

### **3. Organizational Structure**

During the early years of its operation, the RSIM followed a clear organizational structure. Santos acted as the *Amir*, or the overall leader, the core members made up the central committee, and the remainder was broken into three groups in charge of special operations, special actions and security (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 8). During their peak, the RSIM had an estimated strength of 50 members, but latest Intelligence estimates suggest that there are 29 identified hard-core members, 13 full supporters and 11 on the watch list (AFP Intelligence Estimate, 2006, p. 27). RSIM operations are decentralized and compartmentalized, making membership difficult to track and detect below the leadership level. The RSIM is comprised of several loose cell groups from the different “Balik-Islam” front organizations throughout Luzon in the Northern Philippines, and in other areas in the central regions of the Philippines (Agustin, 2005, p. 9). The organization also has strong links with other “Balik-Islam” organizations and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that provide legal cover and support to the movement distributed throughout the Philippines (Agustin, 2005, p. 10).

### **C. LEADERSHIP**

Ahmed Santos and Ruben Lavilla are the two prominent figures in the organization of the RSIM. Both were born into the Catholic faith, are well-educated, come from middle class families, and are representative of young idealists emerging from non-traditional Muslim regions in the Philippines. Other key figures in the RSIM are former overseas contract workers who encountered



the teachings of Islam and converted while working in the Middle East, while others are former members of existing nationalist organizations within the Philippines.

### **1. Ahmed Santos, the RSIM Founder**

Hilarion Del Rosario Santos was the founder and leader of the RSIM until his arrest in Zamboanga City in the Southern Philippines in October 2005. Santos was born as Hilarion Del Rosario Santos III on March 12, 1971 in Anda, Pangasinan in the Northern Philippines. Santos was the eldest of three brothers who were all raised by their grandfather, a former military officer. Their grandfather raised the Santos children with a strong Catholic upbringing (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6). According to Santos, he was raised a “hard-core Catholic” and he is able to accurately cite passages from the Bible (personal communication, April 4, 2008).

After completing high school and a short computer course in Manila, Santos attempted to join the U.S. Marines. After failing to obtain an enlistment, Santos signed up as an OFW to find work in Saudi Arabia. It was there in Saudi Arabia that Santos converted to the Islamic faith. When asked when he first encountered Islam, Santos related that information on Islam formed part of the program of the Saudi firms who hired the OFWs; this program conducted a “pre-departure” briefing for incoming workers and gave indoctrination classes about Islam. Santos states, “It just took me three hours to embrace the Islam faith while in Saudi Arabia” (personal communication, April 4, 2008). From 1992 to 1993, Santos worked for Alkhatah, a contractor of ARAMCO, in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. After his conversion, he spent two years, from 1993 to 1995, undergoing an educational orientation to Islam. During his studies, he met Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, the brother in law of Osama Bin Laden, who was responsible for establishing AQN networks within the Philippines (AFP Report on the Arrest of Santos, 2005). Upon his return to the Philippines, Santos joined an organization that called themselves “Islamic Studies Call and Guidance

(ISCAG),” a legitimate organization that solicits funds and donations from the Middle East for publications of religious materials and missionary work (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6).

In 1995, Santos formed the Fi Sabillah Dawah and Media Foundation, Inc (FSDMFI) to propagate Islam (Special Report, Intelligence Service, AFP, 2006, p. 221). His exposure to the ISCAG and the Islamic Dawah Council of the Philippines (IDCO), particularly the radio programs, influenced Santos’ thoughts on Islam. Ahmad Gerapuso, the alleged founder of ISCAG, was responsible for befriending and recruiting Santos into the BIM (Mendoza, 2002, p. 116).

It was in FSDMFI that Santos honed his skills at propagating Islam through his radio program. He bought airtime to broadcast his views at a regular time-spot on radio and television stations. This notoriety allowed him to establish contacts with the leaders of the MILF (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6). Santos admitted that he went to MILF camp to see Hashim Salamat, the MILF Founder and Chairman, but stressed that he “only went to the MILF camp as a plain journalist to conduct interview of top MILF leaders” (personal communication, April 4, 2008).

In 1999, Santos married his second wife Nurain Dongon, a convert from Cagayan de Oro City in Northern Mindanao. One of Nurain’s three sisters is married to Kadafi Janjalani, the ASG leader, while the other is married to Jainal Sali, the ASG’s second-in-command. The marriage of Santos to his second wife established familial links between the RSIM and the ASG (AFP Report on the Arrest of Santos, 2005, p. 1).

After establishing a connection with the ASG, Santos went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in March 1999 and worked with the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM). With his contacts among different organizations established through his relationship with Khalifa, Santos gained access to funds for the expansion of his activities in the Philippines (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6).

## **2. Ruben Lavilla, RSIM Spiritual Adviser**

In 2001, Ruben Lavilla, an Ilongo (Filipino ethnic group from central Philippines), joined Santos in the RSIM and became their spiritual adviser. With a degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of the Philippines, Lavilla established his own connections in Saudi Arabia and in other countries in the Middle East. He is also a graduate of the University of Medina, where he specialized in Islamic jurisprudence, and trained with Kaddafi Janjalani at the Darul Imam Shafi'ie Academy in Marawi City in 1992 (ICG Report, 2005, p. 7).

Santos claims to have initially met Lavilla at the Indonesian Embassy in Makati City during a prayer session. After their initial meeting, Santos invited Lavilla to produce lectures for Santos' radio program and to personally lead studies in Anda, Pangasinan (AFP Report on the Arrest of Santos, 2005, p. 15). Santos describes Lavilla, now known as Sheikh Omar Lavilla, as "well-educated and a very intelligent man" (personal communication, April 4, 2008). Banlaoi describes Lavilla as the "ideological beacon and the spiritual adviser of the RSIM"; he further describes Lavilla as an "urban mujahideen" (Banlaoi, personal communication, April 2, 2008).

Lavilla is considered a strong advocate of *Wahabism*, and is believed to have taken part in the Chechen jihad. He is also the former president of the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG) in Cavite, and responsible for providing spiritual direction for RSIM members (NICA Report, 2007, p. 1).

At present, AFP reports suggest that the RSIM is under the leadership of Ruben Lavilla, also known as Sheikh Omar Lavilla. Lavilla serves as the conduit of funds from the organizations in the Middle East, and is known as a "mufti", an Islamic scholar who can interpret *Shariah* or the Islamic laws and issue verdicts (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 241).

### **3. Other RSIM Key Personnel**

Pio De Vera is one of the key RSIM members under the tutelage of Santos. He served as the Operations Officer of the RSIM until his arrest in December 2005 in Zamboanga City in the Southern Philippines (Debriefing Report on De Vera, AFP, 2005, p. 1). A bomb demolition expert, he was among the RSIM members initially arrested in Anda, Pangasinan in 2002. Prior to converting and joining the RSIM, De Vera was a member of the New People's Army (NPA) (Banlaoi 2006, p. 7).

Like Ahmed Santos, De Vera also worked in the Middle East as a contract worker. In 1995, he went to Saudi Arabia as an upholstery worker; through constant reading of Islamic leaflets, he converted to Islam and started attending prayer and preaching at the *Da'awah* Center in Riyadh. Other Filipino converts also assisted him in his studies of the Islamic faith. When he returned to the Philippines in 2001, De Vera met a Balik-Islam member and invited him to go to Anda, Pangasinan, where he met Ahmed Santos (Debriefing Report on De Vera, 2005, p. 2).

After the capture of Santos and De Vera in 2005, Dino Amor Pareja filled the leadership vacuum within the RSIM. Pareja focused his efforts on consolidating the remaining RSIM networks for reorganization and building up the organization for future operations. A demolition expert, Pareja is a graduate of the University of the Philippines in Cebu City (a major city in Central Philippines) and is known as the "right hand man" of Santos (Special Report, AFP, 2005, p. 241).

Another key figure in the RSIM is Tyrone Santos, the brother of Ahmed and one of the original founders of the group. He is presently released on bail for a case of illegal possession of firearms and explosives after his arrest in 2004, during which Philippine authorities recovered 600 kilos of explosives in his safe

house. Ricardo Ayeras, another bomb expert, is a key personality who was involved in the planned Operation “Big Bang” and is still at large (Debriefing Report on De Vera, 2005, p. 3).

#### D. LINKAGES

The RSIM has established ties with other radical terrorist groups through inter-marriages, personal contacts, training, and religious practices. The Muslim-Christian conflict in the Southern Philippines is the one issue that allows the different groups to cooperate and maintain relationships with one another. Under JI instructors at MILF camps on Mindanao, RSIM and ASG members have undergone simultaneous training on how to conduct improvised explosive operations (Capuyan, 2005, p. 16). Besides training, these groups, along with NGOs from the Middle East, also provided financial and logistical support to Ahmed Santos and the RSIM (Special Report, AFP, 2005, p. 245).

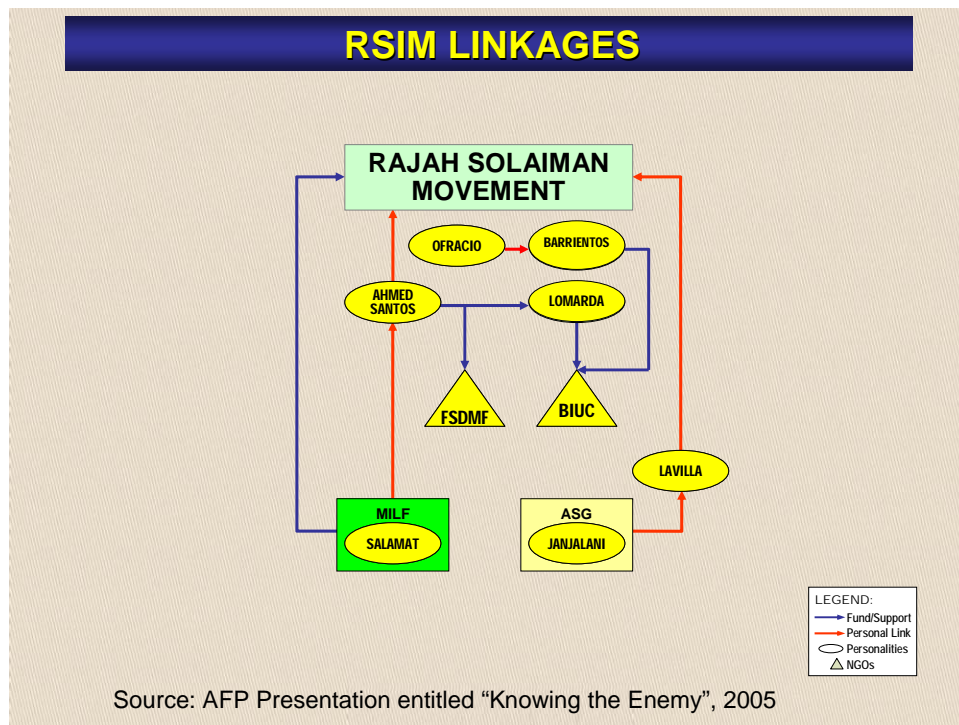


Figure 1. RSIM Linkages (From: AFP Presentation entitled Knowing the Enemy, 2005)

The figure shows the connections between the RSIM, MILF and ASG. It also highlights their connection to the different NGOs and personalities involved, illustrating personal connections and the flow of funding to and from the organizations. Santos' link to the MILF is his personal connection with Salamat, while RSIM's primary link to the ASG is through Lavilla's connection to Janjalani. Of note is the fact that Santos is also married to the sister of Janjalani's wife, creating a familial bond between the two groups. The FSDMFI of Santos and the Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC) are the primary organizations providing support to the RSIM (Capuyan, 2005, p. 16).

### **1. RSIM - ASG Connection**

Even before the RSIM was uncovered in 2002, there were already some Islamic converts who were members of the ASG. Jovenal Bruno, a convert and a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war, was "considered to be the most intellectual of all Abu Sayyaf leaders" (Mendoza, 2005, p. 8). Mendoza (2005) notes that "it was the first time that a "Balik-Islamist" held a vital position in a known terrorist organization" (p. 8) Omar Lavilla's educational ties with Kadafi Janjalani also established a link between the RSIM and the ASG. When their training camp in Anda was raided by Philippine authorities, Lavilla instructed RSIM members to "seek refuge in ASG lairs under Janjalani because the latter had offered to help Balik-Islam members on the run" (NICA Report, 2007, p. 3).

In 1999, Santos married his second wife, Nurain (Loraine) Dungon, a convert from Cagayan de Oro in northern Mindanao. One of Nurain's three sisters, Zinaib, was already married to ASG leader Kadafi Janjalani, while the other, Amina, was the wife of Jainal Sali/Abu Solaiman, the ASG spokesperson and second in command (ICG Report, 2005). These marriages created a familial bond between Santos, the RSIM, and the leaders of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). When police arrested Santos in October 2005, he was operating as the Chief of ASG Media Bureau. Among his possessions recovered were

propaganda materials and other documents from the ASG that clearly showed his involvement with ASG activities (Special Report on the Arrest of Santos, AFP, 2005, p. 3).

## **2. RSIM - MILF - JI- Connection**

The RSIM established links with the MILF as early as 2001. Hashim Salamat, the founder and former MILF Chairman, reportedly provided financial and logistical support to the RSIM. Further, Salamat allowed RSIM members to train in bomb-making and other terrorist tactics with the JI in MILF camps at their Mindanao bases. Based on documents recovered by Philippine authorities, MILF Chairman Ahod Ibrahim, known as Al Haj Murad, provided Santos with a certificate of endorsement on April 7, 2000 to solicit funds for *da'wah* operations (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 244).

After the raid of the RSIM camp in Anda in 2002, Santos advised RSIM members to hide in MILF-SOG (Special Operations Group) camps in Mindanao (NICA Report, 2007, p. 3). However, prior to this, AFP reports state that Santos had already attended training in MILF camps. Evidence of this was found in captured documents after an “all out war” was launched by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) against the MILF in 2000. According to RSIM documents, and other materials seized by authorities from the facility at Anda and from the FSDMFI offices in Quezon City, there were letters from the MILF Vice-Chairman for Internal Affairs allocating support to the RSIM. There were also records of MILF and RSIM personalities and transactions revealing that captured MILF-SOG member Abdul Manap Mentang had links to Ahmed Santos and to other RSIM members (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 245).

The RSIM has also established links with the regional terrorist network, Jemaah Islamiyah. Santos, De Vera, Trinidad, Pareja, and other RSIM members joined the training conducted by the JI in March 2004 at MILF camps in Mindanao. JI instructors directed this training, which focused on demolition, explosives and weapons, and “*kital jihad*”, under the protection of the MILF

(NICA Report, 2007, p. 3). Top JI operatives in the Philippines such as Fathur Roman Al Khozi, Taufiq Refqi, Rohmat alias Zaki, and Zulikpli maintained relationships with Santos and the RSIM. When Philippine authorities arrested Refqi in Cotabato City in 2003, authorities recovered documents linking Santos and the RSIM to JI-planned bombing operations in various locations throughout the Philippines. Zaki, another well-known JI operative in the Philippines, was the primary instructor of RSIM members in the four-month explosives and demolition training in Mount Cararao, an MILF camp located in the boundary of the province of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao in the Southern Philippines (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 244).

The two primary suspects in the Bali bombings in 2002 also have links to Santos and the RSIM; Dulmatin and Omar Patek provided financial support for to bombing operations conducted against foreign nationals in Metro Manila during 2005. In the article *Suicide Terrorism in the Philippines*, Rommel Banlaoi (2006) notes, "Santos confessed that he collaborated with Omar Patek , one of the key suspects in the 2002 Bali bombings while hiding in Mindanao in 2004" (p. 1).

### **3. RSIM - Al Qaeda - Middle East Connection**

Ahmed Santos solidified his links with different Middle East organizations during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1999 and while working with the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM). He was able to establish contact with Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, brother in law of Osama Bin Laden and head of the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), who provided him funding to expand his organization (ICG Report, 2005, p. 7).

The International Islamic Relief Organization (IRRO) was established in 1978 as a humanitarian NGO based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. A branch commenced in Marawi City, Philippines in 1988. While Khalifa established the IRRO as a legitimate Islamic organization, authorities quickly suspected that it was providing covert support to radical groups within the region (Mendoza, 2005, p. 24). AFP Reports state that Muhammad Al-Ghafari, another Jordanian-



Palestinian linked to Khalifa and head of the Islamic World Wide Mission Incorporated (IWWMI), provided funds to the RSIM through Ahmed Santos (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 246).

## **E. FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

The RSIM received funding and support from various NGOs and other charitable institutions in the Middle East during its early days of inception. Santos' link with Mohammad Jamal Khalifa enabled Santos to expand his organizations through funds intended for Muslim education and other charitable works in the Philippines. Since 1995, organizations such as the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), the Islamic Foundation Center and the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM) have become conduits for funds going to the RSIM (Abuza, 2005, p. 36)<sup>3</sup>. The RSIM also received funding from the ASG and the JI. "Khadafi Janjalani, the ASG leader, reportedly gave Santos an amount equivalent to \$200,000 to conduct operations in Metro Manila" (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 10). In his interrogation report, Santos admitted that he received around \$5,000 from a JI operative, Omar Patek, to use in the Manila bombing that planned to target U.S. nationals (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 10). Khadafi Janjalani also gave the RSIM an amount of 10 million (\$200,000 U.S.) pesos through Sheik Omar Lavilla as ASG support to RSIM operations (Capuyan, 2005, p. 16).

During an interview, Santos stated that he received funding from Middle Eastern NGOs that helped him expand his FSDMFI office in Cubao, Quezon City. However, he denied that he received financial support from Middle Eastern NGOs for the purpose of conducting terrorist operations (Santos, personal communication, April 4, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Abuza is one of the leading regional experts regarding International terrorism within Southeast Asia.

## **F. OPERATIONS**

The ASG and the MILF-SOG were the main terrorists groups responsible for several high profile terrorist acts in the Philippines before the emergence of the RSIM. Filipino veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s were the primary leaders of the two organizations. Their experience and training in Afghanistan deeply indoctrinated them with radical interpretations on Islam. They committed themselves to *Islamic jihad* and the attainment of a Theocratic Islamic state in the Southern Philippines (Mendoza, 2005, p. 8).

Mendoza describes this group as “the first generation of Muslim radicals in the Philippines”; some of these Afghan veterans were actually Islamic converts and members of the “Balik-Islam” movement. They joined the MILF or the ASG, and some of them later became members of the RSIM (Mendoza, personal communication, April 3, 2008). Other terrorist groups, such as the MILF-SOG and the ASG, then used the RSIM to conduct terrorist operations in Christian areas such as Metro Manila and other major cities in the Philippines. The RSIM proved useful in these missions because of their influence, mass base and knowledge of the area. DG (Director General), NICA, notes that “the RSIM is hard to distinguish from the rest”, rendering them effective support for any terrorist group wanting to conduct activities (DG, NICA, personal communication, April 3, 2008).

### **1. Zamboanga City Bombing**

The involvement of Islamic converts in terrorist activities in the Philippines can be traced as early as 2001, when police authorities arrested two converts who staged a bombing in Zamboanga City in October 2001, killing 5 people. One of the arrested terrorists, identified as Marvin Geonzon, alias Abdulmakil Geonzon, admitted that he assembled the bomb; however, an ASG member planted the bomb at their designated target site (Mendoza, 2002, p. 119).

Geonzon was born as a Catholic and raised in Manila, but later embraced the Islamic faith after a failed marriage. He converted to Islam in 1997 under the influence of a Saudi national, went to school in order to study the Koran, and eventually settled at the RSIM training camp in Anda, Pangasinan. Geonzon left the RSIM camp in 1998, went to Zamboanga City in Mindanao, and fell into habitual drug use. He was arrested on drug related charges, and spent seven months in jail, where he met ASG members imprisoned with him. Geonzon established a relationship with the ASG members that lasted until the day he was released from prison. Two days after his release, a restaurant was bombed in the downtown Zamboanga. Geonzon was quickly brought into police custody after two witnesses identified him as one of the two individuals suspected in the bombing incident (Hookway, 2002, p. 3).

## **2. Davao City Bombings**

In another incident on October 29, 2001, a convert was responsible for bombing the Office of the Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA) in Davao City. Rasul Fernandez from, Opol, Cagayan de Oro in northern Mindanao, also known as Ustadz Najib Rasul, was fatally wounded in the explosion inside the guestroom of the SPDA compound while he was adjusting the bomb (Mendoza, 2005). C/Supt Rodolfo Mendoza (2002) gives more background of Rasul in his paper, *Philippine Jihad, Inc*, noting that “he (Rasul) was a former pastor before he embraced Islam while he was working in Saudi Arabia” (p. 120).

In March 2003, a bomb exploded in the International Airport at Davao City, killing 21 people and injuring 148 others (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 7). The bombing was carried out by two RSIM members identified as Ibrahim Kessel and Karim Ayeras, along with MILF-SOG members. Banlaoi (2007) suggests, “the terrorist attack was a graduation test for Kessel and Ayeras, who had just finished a bomb training in an MILF camp” (p. 7). The government blamed the bombing directly on the MILF because the existence of the RSIM was still unknown and the bomb had MILF-SOG trademarks (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 7).

### **3. MV Super Ferry 14 Bombing**

The MV Super Ferry 14 bombing on February 27, 2004 was conducted jointly by the RSIM and the ASG. Redento Cain Delloso, the confessed bomber, is an Islamic convert who took responsibility for planting the bomb with an Abu Sayyaf member, Alhamser Manatad Limbong, alias Kosovo. Philippine authorities captured both bombers during an investigation of the attack. Authorities initially denied that the Super Ferry bombing, considered to be one of the worst maritime terrorist attacks in the Philippines, was a terrorist attack; however, investigation later revealed an RSIM-ASG connection to the incident (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 8 ).

The incident ensured that the RSIM would gain notoriety in the national and international scene. Banlaoi (2007) notes, “The Super Ferry bombing was a milestone in the history of RSIM for it received a lot of international and domestic media attention” (p. 10).

### **4. Valentine’s Day Bombing**

Simultaneous bombings in three major Philippine cities in the Philippines on February 14, 2005 showed the degree of coordination the RSIM was able to achieve. This incident provides another case of a combined RSIM-ASG terrorist attack. These incidents, known as the Valentine’s Day bombing, occurred in Makati Central Business District in Metro Manila, Davao City, and General Santos City in the Southern Philippines. The attacks caused the death of four people and wounded over a 100. The Makati City bombing was reportedly carried out by the RSIM on instructions of the ASG. Islamic convert and RSIM member, Angelo Trinidad (alias Abu Khalil) planted the bomb on the passenger bus with the aid of Gamal Baharan (alias Tapay), an ASG bomb expert operating in Metro Manila as part of the ASG Urban Terrorist Group (NICA Report, 2007, p. 5).

The government eventually convicted Angelo Trinidad, Tapay Baharan and JI Rohmat Addurohim of murder and frustrated multiple murders in connection with the bombing in Makati and two other bombings in Davao City and General Santos City in Mindanao (NICA Report, 2007, p. 5). They received the death penalty. However, Ahmed Santos stressed that the Valentine's Day bombing was the sole handiwork of the ASG. Santos claims that Khalil Trinidad received instructions directly from Abu Solaiman, the ASG's second-in-command, and not from the RSIM (AFP Report on the Arrest of Santos, 2005). Santos further offered that "Trinidad could not defy the order because he was already an ASG member" and that on three different occasions, "he (Santos) tried to dissuade Trinidad from carrying out the plan because it would compromise his own plan" (p. 15). The Director General of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) further notes, "The ASG used the RSIM in the Valentine's Day bombing operations in Manila for their own purposes" (DG, NICA, personal communication, April 2, 2008).

## **5. Operation "Big Bang" or "Great Ibadah"**

In March 2005, Philippine authorities prevented a major terrorist plot of the ASG-RSIM with the capture of an RSIM member identified as Tyrone Dave Santos. During the raid, authorities recovered ten sacks (600kg) of explosive materials at an RSIM safe house in Quezon City. The terrorists' plan was supposedly to be carried out during Lenten season; exploding the bombs in areas frequented by American nationals throughout Manila (Banlaoi, 2006, p. 1).

The terrorists envisioned that the operation, codenamed "Operation Big Bang," would produce results similar to the Indonesian Bali bombing. The operation would utilize a "truck bomb" to target the L.A. Café, a popular nightspot in Malate and one of Manila's tourist districts (ICG Report, 2005, p. 17). During his interrogation, Pio De Vera admitted that Ahmed Santos asked him to prepare a car bomb with a maximum capacity of one thousand kilos of explosives to

bomb a target frequented by foreign nationals. He further revealed that the operation would be a suicide bombing or a martyrdom operation of the RSIM (Debriefing Report on De Vera, AFP, 2005, p. 4).

## **6. Other RSIM Terror Activities**

Aside from directly participating in bombing operations, RSIM members provided safe houses and other logistical support to ASG members in Metro Manila and other Christian areas in the Philippines. Jayve Ofrasio, a Balik-Islam convert, was arrested in Belfast, Ireland in January 2004 on suspicion of providing support to the ASG and JI operatives (Capuyan, 2005, p. 17). In his article *Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf*, Zachary Abuza (2005) notes that “he (Ofrasio) provided a safe house for Tauriq Riefqi, an Indonesian JI operative in Cotabato and Zulkipli, another top JI operative in the Philippines, and was arrested in 2003 as he tried to enter Malaysia using a passport in the name of Dani Ofrasio” (p. 37).

The RSIM also provided a safe house for JI operative, Fathur Roman Al Khozi, when he escaped from his detention cell at the National Police Headquarters in Camp Crame, Metro Manila in July 2003 (Agustin, 2005, p. 10). Philippine authorities eventually killed Al Khozi when they tried to apprehend him in Mindanao a few days after his escape.

Since the arrest of Santos in 2005, the RSIM has been forced to focus on reorganization and recruitment. As a result, members have avoided high profile terrorist activities in order to regenerate their organizational infrastructure. From 2005 to 2007, the RSIM, devoid of its key leaders, did not carry out any activities of significance. On October 19, 2007, the RSIM suddenly reemerged in the spotlight as Omar Lavilla claimed responsibility for the Glorietta bombing in the heart of the Makati business district. Even though extensive investigations ruled out the possibility of a terrorist attack, the RSIM was resurrected in the minds of the Filipino people (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 13).

## **G. CURRENT ASSESSMENT**

Banlaoi (2007) remarks, "Philippine law enforcement and security authorities stressed that the RSIM is the newest threat facing the Philippines today" (p. 16). The RSIM is an emerging concern due to its ties with other terrorist groups such as the ASG, the JI and other rouge elements of the MILF. Banlaoi further observes that "the RSIM is having internal organizational problems, and RSIM remnants are more aggressive and daring than the ASG members" (p. 17). NICA Director General stressed that "the RSIM is still a threat because RSIM has a more direct link with Al Qaeda than the other terrorist groups in the country" (DG, NICA, personal communication, April 2, 2008).

On the other hand, top military intelligence officials described the RSIM with less temerity: "...after the arrest of Santos in 2005, they are no longer a threat, and nothing compared to the communist New People's Army (NPA)" (top military intelligence officer, personal communication, April 3, 2008). Rodolfo Mendoza claims that the "RSIM was believed to be disbanded in 2005 after the arrest of Santos, and the different major bombing activities in the country were no longer RSIM but solely ASG guided operations" (Mendoza, personal communication, April 3, 2008).

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## **IV. THE RSIM AS A THREAT: AN ANALYSIS**

Some Philippine security experts claim that following the arrests of key RSIM leaders, including that of Ahmed Santos in 2005, RSIM no longer represents a major terrorist concern. Philippine government estimates state, “The capability of the group to wage terrorism has been effectively checked and contained” (AFP Intelligence Estimate, 2006, p. 30). However, other experts and government officials believe that as long as the number of Filipino Christians converts to Islam continues to grow, and the Moro issue remains in the south, the threat of groups like RSIM will remain. Social movements in the Philippines, like others throughout the world, typically experience an ebb and flow pattern within their life cycles. Because the environment within the Philippines remains unchanged and the ingredients to create a dangerous radical group remain, few analysts would be surprised if a radical RSIM-like group eventually reemerged and surpassed RSIM’s previous strength in terms of size and operations.

Drawing on McAdam’s political process model discussed earlier, we now focus our analysis of the rise of the RSIM. As McAdam notes, three broad sets of factors must fall into place before a social movement can emerge: expanding political opportunities, increased indigenous organizational strength and the development of an insurgent consciousness. It is to a discussion of these factors that we now turn.

### **A. EXPANDING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

As noted earlier, political opportunities include “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured” (McAdam, 1982, p. 41). These can include (but are not limited to) “wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic change” (McAdam, 1982, p. 41). Nevertheless, we need to be cautious in our use and identification of “political opportunities.” As Gamson and Meyer (1996) have warned, “[t]he

concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, ... It threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective activism. Used to explain much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all" (p. 273). Thus, in the present instance, we need to show how specific changes in the external environment (i.e., external to RSIM) provided RSIM the opportunity to mobilize.

### **1. Christian Migration to Mindanao**

"The Muslim secessionist movement was caused by economic, political and social marginalization of the earlier inhabitants of Mindanao as a result of the continued migration of Christians" (Morales, 2003, p. 35). This demographic change caused a major conflict between the new Christian settlers and the Muslim natives of the Southern Philippines. From less than a million Christian migrants in 1948, movement increased to 2.3 million in 1970; by 1990, the Muslim population in Mindanao was only 17 percent, and about 5 percent in the entire Philippines (McKenna, 2003, p. 1).

Thomas McKenna (2003) notes that the "Christian migrations to Muslim Mindanao caused inevitable dislocations...also produced glaring disparities between Christian settlers and Muslim farmers" (p. 1). From the Commonwealth period through the administrations following the Philippine independence, the government developed a major economic program that benefited Christian settlers. These settlers, who possess better education and more political influence, received titles on their lands as well as better government support than the original Muslim settlers in the region (McKenna, 2003, p. 2).

During the HUK rebellion, then Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay worked through his "All Out Friendship or All Out Force" strategy to provide lands for HUK guerillas who surrendered to the government. Magsaysay also assisted other Christian settlers in Mindanao through the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), which administered socio-economic development during the Anti-HUK

period (Pena, 2007, p. 37). Leonardo Pena (2007) remarks that the “EDCOR project became the answer to counter the HUK slogan of ‘land for the landless’” (p. 38).

Since the HUK rebellion, land issues between Muslims and Christians led to violence between the two groups, later resulting in the formation of the Muslim secessionist movement.

## **2. The Moro Conflict**

The rise of student activism and the political awakening of student sectors in major colleges and universities in the early 1970s helped contribute to the political instability of the Philippine government, thereby expanding the political opportunities available to various Muslim secessionist movements in the Philippines. As urbanization dramatically increased, student activism emerged in the metro area; at the same time, international events abroad showcased students influencing their own local governments. The University of the Philippines, one of the leading educational institutions in the country, became the birthplace of the Muslim secessionist movement ideology. Nur Misuari, a young Muslim professor from the university, organized the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as an “instrument for the liberation of the Moro nation” (Santos, 2005, p. 2). Indeed, Misuari became a symbol for the “free and independent state of the *Bangsa Moro people* in Mindanao” (Santos, 2005, p. 1). Inspired by both the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) of the late 1960s and the alleged 1968 “Jabidah Massacre” (Gloria & Vitug, 2000, pp. 2-23), Filipino Muslims engaged in student activism and other major protest actions against the government. Thomas McKenna (2000) notes that the “Jabidah Massacre had a galvanizing effect on the Muslim student community in Manila” (p. 141). The ideological foundations of other prominent Muslim scholars, such as Hashim Salamat (who later founded the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and whose teachings became the basis of RSIM’s fundamentalist ideology), were formed through their education in the Middle East. During the 1960s and 1970s, several

Filipino Muslims, including Salamat, received scholarship grants in Egypt as part of Gamel Nasser's education program, and most studied at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo (McKenna, 2000, p. 141).

### **3. The Philippine Economy and the OFW Program**

The decline in the Philippine economy that began in the 1970s and continues to the present day helped fuel (and continues to fuel) political unrest, not only in Mindanao, but also in urban centers across the country (Magno & Gregor, 1986, p. 506). An increase in poverty and a general lack of employment opportunities resulted in mass dissatisfaction with the government. Radical organizations drew their leaders from the ranks of these discontented Filipinos, including figures within the various "Balik-Islam" organizations and their radical RSIM offshoot. These poor economic conditions persist in the Philippines, and the current state of affairs remains a grievance for Filipinos seeking better opportunities.

Because the Philippine economy continues to rely on the exportation of labor, Saudi Arabia remains the primary destination for Filipino workers (Go, 2005, p. 4). The Philippines' dependence on the dollar remittances of its overseas workers further exposes the country to the continuous influx of Islamic converts, who mostly return to their homes in Metro Manila and other Christian areas in northern and central Philippines (ICG Report, 2005, p. 4).

Technological advancement and industrialization also contributed to the growth of BIM movements such as RSIM. In response to economic deprivation, many Filipinos, including Muslims from Mindanao, migrated from rural areas to major urban centers, leading to further increases in the unemployment rate and exasperations of political unrest. Other economic conditions, such as the perceived hegemony of elites in major economic infrastructures, the unequal distribution of wealth and the exploitation of resources, contributed to this situation as well. Interestingly, not only did the weak Philippine economy lead to

political unrest, but it also led a number of Filipino workers to travel to the Middle East through the Overseas Foreign Workers (OFW) program, a number of whom returned to their homes as Islamic converts (ICG Report, 2005, p. 4).

## **B. INCREASED INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH**

Isolated from other factors, expanding political opportunities do not give rise to social movements. Other necessary contributing factors may include resources needed to mobilize and sustain the cause. As noted above, resources may consist of increased education and wealth within the aggrieved population or access to the wealth of sympathetic (and often international) supporters. Strong, indigenous organizations play key roles as well because they contribute five resources that are necessary for the development of a social movement: members, leaders, solidary incentives, communication networks and enterprise tools. As the following discussion illustrates, the Moro conflict, the OFW program and the BIM movement all contributed to the rise of RSIM by providing a pool of potential converts (i.e., members), by creating a sense of solidarity among like-minded individuals, by training and educating future leaders, and by developing the social (communication) networks needed to facilitate the diffusion of the movement's ideology.

### **1. Members**

Social movements do not arise from unorganized groups or isolated individuals but rather from existing organizations that share similar interests, grievances and/or experiences (Smith, 1991, p. 60). BIM's various legitimate, preexisting organizations (with an estimated membership of 200,000) provided RSIM a pool of potential recruits (Banlaoi, 2006, p. 1). As noted previously, Ahmed Santos himself is a former member of Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), a legal BIM organization established in 1991 with the objective of soliciting Saudi donations for charitable institutions in the Philippines (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6). Other prominent members of the RSIM came from legitimate

BIM organizations such as the Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC) and the Islamic Information Center (IIC), as well as other BIM organizations scattered throughout the country (Mendoza, 2005, pp. 20-34). A majority of RSIM and BIM members originated from the pool of Overseas Filipino Workers who worked in the Middle East. Ahmed Santos, key leaders and most RSIM members were former overseas workers who converted to Islam during their stay in the Middle East or upon their return to the Philippines. Inter-marriages and personal ties further helped BIM and RSIM grow.

## **2. Established Structure of Solidary Incentives**

The hope of a better life and the improvement of their social, political and economic status was a primary motivation for Filipinos converting to Islam (Villaviray, 2003, p. 4). Social disappointments may encourage people to convert. As Rodolfo Mendoza describes it, “Filipinos are fond of searching for new horizons and they are naturally very religious. It is no surprise that they are turning to religion to escape the disappointments in life” (Mendoza, 2005, p. 2). Mendoza further argues that the Philippines became the breeding ground for radicals because of poverty, injustice and the failure of the government to effectively deal with these problems. It is important to note that these inducements to conversion have no basis in social or educational status because frustrations with the existing social system are not limited to any specific class or educational level (Villaviray, 2003, p. 4). Aside from poverty and other economic stresses, some Filipinos converted to Islam in response to frustration with their former religious traditions. Joey Ledesma, a member of a wealthy Philippine and the spokesperson of the Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC), converted to Islam after growing dissatisfied with Roman Catholicism (Special Report, pcij.org, 2003). Islam, like many other religions, promises life in paradise, and many people felt drawn to this promise. Villaviray (2003) notes that “according to the Koran, a good Muslim will be rewarded after death with a huge marble palace and virgins and young boys to attend to him” (p. 2).

The use of religion, specifically Islam, allows BIM organizations to organize and motivate its members. Christian Smith (1996) asserts, "Perhaps the most potent motivational leverage that a social-movement can enjoy is the alignment of its cause with the ultimacy and sacredness associated with God's will, eternal truth, and the absolute moral structure of the universe" (p. 9). Such an alignment has allowed RSIM to motivate Filipinos Muslims in a manner that has enabled feverous and uncompromising support from some of its members. By convincing members to broaden their support and participation in BIM organizations to that of RSIM (under the premise of carrying out Allah's word), RSIM is able to forgo the costs of establishing incentives for participation.

### **3. Communication Networks**

McAdam (1982) describes a social movement's ideology as a "new cultural item subject to the same pattern of diffusion and adoption as other innovations" (p. 47). Existing communication networks provide a means for an insurgency to propagate its message to potential members (Smith, 1991, p. 60). The RSIM relied on the different communication networks to expand their influence and organization. Santos used BIM organizations to recruit potential members of the RSIM. He also established links with Middle East NGOs for support. Rodolfo Mendoza observes that the "RSIM has a more direct link with the different organizations in the Middle East than the other terrorist groups in the Philippines and that the OFW is the main support network of the Balik-Islam organizations in the country" (personal communication, April 4, 2008). The RSIM also used its ties with the MILF and the ASG for training and other logistical elements necessary for the growth of the organization. Omar Lavilla's tie with Janjalani also increased the capability and operational reach of the RSIM. On the other hand, the Director General of NICA describes the RSIM as "having a stronger tie with the Al Qaeda Networks (AQN) than the JI, while the ASG and the MILF has stronger ties with the JI" (personal communication, April 2, 2008).

Insurgent groups can also use the media to promote the organization, as did RSIM. Ahmed Santos, a media practitioner himself, drew on his media networks to expand RSIM. He established his own media organization, and then used his radio program to propagate his teachings and to attract public sympathy and support. The 2007 Glorietta bombing in Makati City (Metro Manila's Business district) offers a good example of the role that the media played in resurrecting RSIM's name, when after Santos's arrest, the organization was no longer considered a major threat (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 1). Although Philippine authorities ruled out the influence of terrorism in the incident, the media helped RSIM resurface in the minds of the people, preparing fertile ground for future propaganda efforts.

#### **4. Leaders**

Social movements need people who provide strategic direction, make decisions, articulate the movement's interests and take the initiative in accomplishing the movement's goal (Smith, 1991, p. 60). Well-educated and charismatic leaders played key roles in the rise of various Philippine social movements. Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat, the charismatic leaders of the MNLF and the MILF, provided inspiration for the struggle of many Filipino Islamic movements, including BIM. In the case of RSIM, Ahmed Santos and Omar Lavilla operated as the central figures in the movement. Santos supplied overall leadership while Lavilla supervised RSIM's religious and ideological direction (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 241). Both are well educated, draw on a wide network of support from both international and local sources, and possess the charisma to lead and motivate the group's members.

With the capture of Santos and other key sub-leaders in 2005, RSIM has experienced a leadership vacuum, and the operations and networks of the RSIM have been largely disrupted (Special Report, AFP, 2006, p. 241). Because RSIM is a leader-centered organization and its operations were centered on Santos, its operational activities and capabilities have been fragmented, which is why many



believe that the organization was effectively deactivated in 2006 (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 1). However, Lavilla, who is still at large, possesses the influence and capability to resurrect RSIM if he is able to garner financial support and the social conditions remain in the same state as they are today. Although there is no indication that RSIM is presently engaged in any operational activities, Rodolfo Mendoza argues that the “RSIM clearly has a capacity to re-emerge” (personal communication, April 4, 2008).

## **5. Other Factors**

OFW remittances are one of the biggest inputs to the Philippine economy. In 2006, 12.8 billion remittances were recorded, an increase of 19.4 percent from the previous year. In 2007, this number grew to a record 14.45 billion (Dumlao, 2008, p. 1). Based on the report of the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central bank of the Philippines), the increase in OFW remittances are due to the extended and continuous deployment of Filipino workers overseas. On average since 2006, OFW remittances have been over one billion dollars each month (GMA News Research, 2007, p. 1).

External support to BIM related projects can be traced back to financial support from Saudi affiliated individuals and organizations. One such organization is the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). The IIRO was the primary Muslim NGO that provided support to Muslim organizations in the Philippines from 1995 until its closure in 2001. Khalifa, who headed the IIRO, established several organizations in the Philippines, including the Al-Makdum University in Zamboanga, which provided student scholarships and charitable support to displaced Muslims. Unfortunately, in addition to these legitimate activities, the IIRO also channeled funding to terrorist groups operating within the Philippines (Abuza, 2003, p. 5).

### **C. COGNITIVE LIBERATION (INSURGENT CONSCIOUSNESS)**

What motivates an individual to join a movement? Why does an individual join and fight for a cause? Christian Smith (1996) notes that it is a natural tendency for individuals to feel some degree of regret, disappointment, frustration and guilt if they see some violation of an individual's basic rights. Some react to such injustices by simply accepting them, others by openly opposing them, and still others by taking an active role in stopping or attempting to correct them (Smith, 1996, p. 134). "Social movements represent this kind of action, where people's sense of what is right and just is so seriously violated that they feel compelled not only to express disapproval but to organize to set things right" (Smith, 1996, p. 134). Nevertheless, it takes more than a set of grievances to motivate a group of people to do something about perceived (real or imagined) injustices. Individuals must develop a collective sense that together they can do something about their shared situation. They must develop what Smith (1991) calls an "insurgent consciousness," "a collective state of understanding which stems from the subjective interpretation of the objective social situation in which a potential movement group finds itself" (p. 62). "It is a state of being which perceives, interprets, and explains a social situation in such a way that compels people to collectively organize and act to change that social situation" (McAdam, 1982, p. 51).

The rise of Islamic converts and the RSIM are a direct result of a people's desire to fight against the perceived neglect and oppression of Filipino Muslims at the hands of the dominant Christian population. Four decades of Moro conflict and centuries of struggle for self-determination helped to create this "injustice frame," which has become an inspiration for Philippine Islamic converts. They identify with these Filipino Muslims, whom they see as victims of injustice, oppression, government neglect and other social injustices inherent in the Philippine political, social and economic environment. The resulting insurgent consciousness was further reinforced by the sense of solidarity arising out of

conflicts in the Middle East, Iraq, Bosnia and other parts of the world. For instance, the Director General of NICA notes that the “war in Iraq influenced the radicalization of the Filipinos” (personal communication, April 2, 2008).

## **1. The Moro Conflict**

The Moro conflict in Mindanao provided the ideological basis for the birth and growth of Islamic converts and the RSIM (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2). Soliman Santos, Jr. (2005) describes the conflict as the “clash between two imagined nations or nationalism” (p. 1). He describes the foundational causes of the Moro conflict as: (1) economic marginalization; (2) political domination; (3) physical insecurity; (4) threatened Moro and Islamic identity; (5) perception that the government is the principal party to blame; and (6) perception of hopelessness under the present establishment (Santos, 2005, p. 2).

Santos capitalized on these opportunities to “further his goal of propagating the true essence of Islam and to correct misconceptions about Islam and Muslims” (ICG Report, 2005, p. 6). He envisioned establishing an Islamic community on his own property in the Northern Philippines where, like the MILF’s Camp Abu Bakar in Mindanao, Muslims could practice the true teachings of Islam (personal communication, April 4, 2008). Santos used his organization as a legal cover while effectively using print and media outlets to promote Wahabbism and preach the need for jihad to obtain Islamic purifications within BIM communities (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 5).

The Moro conflict also helped established Santos and RSIM’s link to Muslim groups such as the MILF and the ASG, who are advocating for an independent Islamic state of the Southern Philippines (Banlaoi, 2007, p. 2). The alleged abuses committed against Muslims in the Philippines and throughout the world became the rallying point in recruitment and propagation of Islamic teachings. The issues of Christian domination of Muslim lands, the exploitation of

Mindanao's natural resources by Christian elites and the lack of concern and representation in the central government are still major grievances that Santos formerly decried in propaganda efforts aimed at attracting possible recruits.

## **2. The Philippine Economy and the OFW Program**

As discussed above, a stagnant Philippine economy led to a lack of employment opportunities and an increase in Filipinos living below the poverty line, thus resulting in mass dissatisfaction with the government. Magno and Gregor (1986) note that the "economy of the Philippines has collapsed into a negative growth" (p. 506), and that these "economic dislocations" produced structural imbalances that were exploited by radical groups (Magno & Gregor, 1986, p. 506). Other economic conditions, such as the perceived hegemony of elites in major economic infrastructures, unequal distribution of wealth and exploitation of resources, added the basic grievances that attract people to join social movements (Magno & Gregor, 1986, p. 506). Unfortunately, these economic conditions are still present in the Philippines and remain a source of grievance for Filipinos seeking better opportunities.

## **3. Peace Talks**

As noted above, the on-ongoing peace talks between the MILF and the Philippine government represent a major concern for the Muslim population in the Philippines. If the current negotiations solve the Moro issue, the threat of terrorist attacks from radical groups such as the RSIM will fade. However, several years have passed since the initial negotiations began in 1997, and the issues of "ancestral domain" and the "establishment of a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsa Moro people" (Santos, 2005, p. 18) continue to be hotly debated topics. The MILF claims that the "insincerity of the Arroyo regime is the main obstacle to the conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement in Mindanao with the Government of the Philippines (GRP)" (Canana, 2008, p. 1). A failure in the on-going peace process will fuel the fire of

discontent, so to speak, increasing rather than diminishing the insurgent consciousness of RSIM-type groups. Failure would increase the perception of “religious discrimination” and violence directed at Muslims, such as the alleged killing of a Muslim family in a military operation carried out in Sulu, Philippines. This specific event led to an MNLF attack on a military camp as retribution for the incident, which then escalated into a major armed conflict during March 2005 (International Religious Freedom Report 2005, U.S. State Department). Filipino Muslims often claim that the government’s counterterrorist operations unfairly target Islamic schools, mosques and other Muslim communities, considering them terrorist havens. “Every time a bomb explodes in Mindanao or Metro Manila, the police always make Muslim communities potential targets of discriminatory raids” (Special Report, The Manila Times, 2004, p. 1). A failure in the on-going peace process could further solidify support for radical leaders by granting the cause a seemingly warranted grievance against the government.

#### **4. Ideological Formation**

Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat, two of the most educated Filipino Muslims leaders of the Muslim secessionist movement, have greatly influenced the rise of the Muslim conflict. Misuari studied at the University of the Philippines during the time when student activism was at its peak in the fight against the Marcos administration (Santos, 2005, p. 4). Misuari was a recipient of a government scholarship through the Commission on National Integration (CNI), a program aimed at providing quality education to young and deserving Muslim students. While studying in Manila, Misuari experienced a strong anti-Muslim culture, which resulted in his frustrations against the existing Christian dominated institutions (McKenna, 2003, p. 3). His experience is not an isolated one; McKenna (2003) observes that, “by 1968, the CNI scholarship program had unintentionally created a group of young Muslim intellectuals schooled in political activism” (p. 6).

Similarly, Hashim Salamat received a scholarship in the Middle East at the Al-Azhar University in Egypt. During his stay at the university, Salamat was the Secretary-General of the Organization of Asian Students, and his thoughts were highly influenced by the ideas of Muslim Brotherhood leader Syed Qutb (Ressa, 2003, p. 125). Salamat is more inclined to fundamentalist ideology and orientation, and this constitutes his main difference with Misuari, who is more secular and nationalist in his thinking (Santos, 2005, p. 4). Salamat's contemporaries at the university in Cairo contributed to his ideological formation. Among them were Burhanuddin Rabanni and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, prominent leaders of the Muslim mujahideen in the Soviet-Afghanistan war (ICG Report, 2004, p. 3).

Abdurajak Janjalani, the founder of the ASG, also contributed to the development of BIM and RSIM ideology. Janjalani's religious training in Libya in 1988, at which time he met Jovinal Bruno, an Islamic convert who later joined the ASG, and their subsequent participation in the Soviet-Afghan war, provided the foundation for the fundamentalist thoughts of the radical BIM (Mendoza, 2005, p. 9). The ASG, originally named Al-Harakat-al-Islamiya (Islamic Movement), chose as its primary objective the establishment of an independent Islamic state in the Southern Philippines, the same objective for which Ahmed Santos and the RSIM are laboring (ICG Report, 2008, p. 7).

Finally, both Ahmed Santos and Omar Lavilla received their educational training in the Middle East. Lavilla is a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina where he specialized in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and Santos underwent the Saudi *daawa* activity conducted by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Propagation and Guidance. This agency also manages outreach programs for non-Muslim residents in Saudi Arabia (ICG Report, 2005, p. 4). The teachings and ideological thoughts of Salamat and other MILF leaders later supplemented these educational experiences when Santos established links with the MILF, the ASG and other terrorist groups.

## **5. Government Programs and Actions**

President Marcos's declaration of martial law in 1972 as a response to the Muslim secessionist movements resulted in an open rebellion by the MNLF. This, in turn, was followed by a series of military campaigns by the Philippine government (Santos, 2005, p. 9). These all-out wars against the MNLF during the 1970s and against the MILF in 2000, along with other oppressive actions directed at Muslim secessionist groups, provided political opportunities for the growth of the BIM and the RSIM (ICG Report, 2005, p. 7). An ICG Report published in 2005 disclosed that one of the immediate objectives of the RSIM operations in 2002 was "to divert military attention from the Basilan based ASG" (p. 7) and served as retaliation for the AFP's military offensive in Mindanao MILF camps.

## **6. Framing of Issues**

Radical leaders have effectively framed their ideology to resonate with the concerns of BIM members. Though many members undergo training and education at various institutions, groups cannot reasonably expect that all potential members will have a formal education adequate for fully understanding the group's ideology. In order to overcome this obstacle, group leaders reduce their message to generalized snippets of the ideology so that they may easily repeat the core beliefs to the public through their followers (Robinson, 2004, p. 129). Robinson (2004) compares this tactic to using popular "bumper sticker" versions of ideology to resonate with the desires of the target audience. This is clearly evident in the continued reference to issues of "ancestral domain" and "self determination," which radical groups use to shape the Moro-conflict debate. Another case in point is RSIM's moniker, which draws its name from Rajah Solaiman, a Filipino Muslim ruler of Manila before the Spanish conquest in the 15<sup>th</sup> century who many believe to be a grandson of the Sultan of Brunei and a scion of the Bornean dynasty (ICG Report, 2005, p. 3). However, as Banlaoi (2006) points out, "Rajah Solaiman was a Spanish collaborator during the Spanish period, unlike his other Muslim brothers in the Southern Philippines.

Thus, organizing a Muslim liberation movement in his honor is an apparent contradiction” (p. 17) Nonetheless, most aggrieved individuals living in a Manila slum are not particularly precise about history, and by framing the issue using a historic figure upon which a new narrative of rebellion could be constructed, Ahmed Santos exhibited a keen understanding of what is needed to foment discord in Philippine society.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

As illustrated above, RSIM capitalized on the existence of the factors McAdam insists must be present for a social movement to emerge. The expanding political opportunities afforded through the Moro conflict, the rise in participation in the OFW program, and political unrest laid the groundwork for the creation and expansion of BIM. With abundant resources available, RSIM founders used the pool of potential members, external support developed through international interactions, advances in technology and media and the solidarity created through education and training to carve out a group of like-minded individuals—RSIM. All of these factors solidified with the insurgent consciousness created through the framing of grievances and formation of a radical ideology perceived as necessary to achieve the organization’s goals. These factors have been decades in the making, and a short-term solution for just one of these environmental conditions or grievances is unlikely to be achieved easily.



## V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. CONCLUSION

The RSIM, which represents a small but radical fundamentalist group within the broader social milieu of the Islamic converts in the Philippines, advocates for the conversion of the entire country to Islam. RSIM figured prominently in several high profile terrorist attacks in recent years; specifically, RSIM worked closely with the ASG in bombing operations in Metro Manila and other major urban centers in the country, as well as provided the necessary support in carrying out these terrorist attacks.

After a series of counter-terrorism successes by Philippine authorities in recent years, the RSIM in mid-2008 may not appear at first glance to pose a significant threat to the security of the Philippines. However, if the social factors for its initial emergence are considered, it is clear that the RSIM is still a major concern for the Philippine government in the future because the major issues for its emergence and growth are still present in Philippine society. The main political, social and economic problems that gave rise to the radicalization of some Islamic converts remain largely unchanged. Despite the arrests of key leaders in 2005 and the subsequent disruption of its organization and networks, the emergence of new radical groups within the growing “Balik-Islam” organizations remains a genuine possibility. Since government counter-terrorism efforts focus primarily on hunting individual leaders, the social, political and ideological causes of terrorism have not changed. Any new batch of radicals that might emerge from the residual group of militant Islamic converts would be capable of conducting attacks similar to the *Super Ferry 14* bombing, the *Valentine’s Day* bombing and other suicide terrorist operations. If they follow Ahmed Santos’s model, they will be able to generate funding from the Middle East, and, like RSIM, the door will be open to established alliances with other terrorist groups such as the ASG and the JI.

Given the fact that the Philippine economy continues to rely on labor exports to the Middle East, the wider “Balik-Islam” Movement (BIM), which continuously provides the necessary support base to radical groups of Islamic converts, will still be a major concern for the Philippine government. The influx of money from organizations in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, will continue to finance Islamic schools, mosques, community projects and other religious activities that will serve as a medium for recruitment and training of potential radical Islamic converts, and later potential terrorists. The lack of government supervision over returning overseas workers from the Middle East, as well as the absence of a re-integration program for these workers, will further increase the pool of recruits that BIM organizations may radicalize through indoctrinations and propaganda.

Solving the problem of radicalism within the ranks of the “Balik-Islam” will be a lengthy process. Addressing the problem requires that the government look for solutions to the root causes of the Mindanao rebellion and the social discontent among Filipino Muslims. The socio-political-economic environment that sparked and flamed social discontent among Filipino Muslims, the organizational strength that propelled the movement to its growth and the various issues that bonded them together into a cohesive force should be addressed, not only by the government, but also by the entire society, since BIM is a product of interplay among a variety of social factors.

Although the government signed the Philippine Human Security Act of 2007 (the Philippine anti-terrorism law) in March 2007, the current Philippine anti and counter-terrorism efforts do not establish a specific program for addressing the rise of radical groups within the BIM. Considering that the Philippines is a democratic country that guarantees each citizen the freedom to choose and practice his own belief, the government cannot at present address an individual’s conversion to Islam. Even the current Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP), the main strategy to address various threat groups, does not have specific provisions for confronting the threat of radical Islamic converts in the

Philippines. NISP focuses on the communist insurgency and the threat of the ASG. However, the problem of radicalism within the ranks of BIM organizations undoubtedly poses a threat to the country's security, and the government should make an effort to formalize plans for dealing with the problem.

The Philippine government cannot solve the problem of terrorism and insurgency merely by capturing an organization's leader and disrupting its networks. Historically, Islamist terrorist groups have re-emerged in other countries when new leaders rose up to carry on the struggle. Military solutions and active counter-terrorism efforts will not solve the problems either. In contrast, government policy must address the motivations, mindset, and desires of individuals because the strengths of the BIM are deeply rooted in the economic, social and political conditions of the Philippines. As long as there are valid grievances such as poverty, human rights abuses, corruption in the political system, perceived neglect of minorities and religious conflict within the social and political system, radical Islamic converts will continue to present a major challenge for the Philippine government. As Victor Corpus (1989), a Filipino general who was once an NPA leader, notes in his book *The silent war*, "eradicating insurgency is like eliminating grass in one's cropland. Cutting the grass or burning it may clear the field for a while, but with the first drop of rain, the weeds will be back, vigorously choking the crop" (p. 181). Put simply, as long as there are peasants without land to till, workers without factories to work, frustrated professionals, students and other intellectuals who can provide leadership and other related skills and organizations that can provide the necessary resources, there will always be social movements that challenge the legitimacy of the Philippine state. The government must attend to these realities if it ever hopes to counteract terrorism effectively.

## **B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Philippine government can address the threat of developing radical groups within the growing "Balik-Islam" Movement (BIM) by providing a

comprehensive multi-agency solution that will address the social, political and economic causes lying behind the rise of such movements. Specifically, we recommended the following:

- 1. Pursue an Attainable and Acceptable Peace Agreement between the MILF and the GRP in the Near Future**

This means that the Government of the Philippines (GRP) should continue peace negotiations with the MILF and other threat groups, relentlessly pursuing viable and acceptable provisions that will provide a lasting solution to the long existing Moro conflict in the Southern Philippines. The Philippine government should continue its current mechanism for dealing with the MILF. The government should enhance the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), which serves as a coordinating body for both the GRP and the MILF in resolving major conflicts in the peace process. The GRP should initiate more exploratory talks with the MILF on issues of “ancestral domain” and “self determination,” the major concerns in the current peace negotiations. Aside from the MILF, the GRP should also review the implementation of the existing peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF that both signed in 1996 to avoid further grievances from the Filipino Muslims not only in Mindanao but also in the whole of the Philippines. One of the largest obstacles to overcome arises from within the MILF itself. MILF leaders do not seem to have a firm control over subordinate base commanders who may have deeper radical Islamic sympathies. These commanders allow foreign and domestic terrorists to use their bases for training and as safe havens (ICG Report, 2008, p. 5). With conditions such as these present, the GRP should also highlight for the MILF and MNLF agreement provisions stipulating that they will not provide support or any form of assistance to terrorist organizations such as the ASG and JI. Likewise, MILF leaders must find a way to exercise the control over these commanders that they insist to the government they have. Finally, while finding a solution to the Moro conflict represents a highly

complicated task, such a solution will offer the greatest benefits as it will decrease the grievances that feed the insurgent consciousness of Filipino Islamic converts.

## **2. Institute Greater Inter-Agency Collaboration and Data Exchange between Different Government Agencies**

The Department of Foreign Affairs, Bureau of Immigration, Department of Labor and Employment and other government and law enforcement agencies involved should have effective information sharing on the monitoring, processing and supervision of overseas workers before leaving and after their return to the country. There should be a database for all returning Overseas Filipino Workers from the Middle East and other countries detailing necessary information on their backgrounds and affiliations to other organizations; further, all law enforcement agencies should possess ready access to this information. This database will allow the government to identify and monitor workers who have converted to Islam, received radical exposure or been involved in radical activities while working in the Middle East. Additionally, by providing relevant data for policy makers, the GRP will be able to develop effective programs and policies that enrich the OFW experience and reduce the grievances that they experience upon their return from abroad.

## **3. Develop a Reintegration Program for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW)**

The Philippines should offer returning Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) a re-integration program to the mainstream society that enables them to reintegrate with Philippine society and culture. The program should provide employment opportunities or livelihood programs that will allow them to develop a stable economic life after working abroad. As mentioned above, identifying and knowing the status of returning workers is paramount to implementing effective programs. By affording purpose and hope to workers who have chosen to return the

Philippines, the Philippines will reduce the frustrations of these individuals, thus robbing radical groups of opportunities to exploit the “insurgent consciousness” and form relationships for recruitment.

#### **4. Establish a Strong Security and Defense Organization**

The Philippines must ensure that the various security agencies involved in anti and counter-terrorism efforts—the military, the police and other government entities—are capable in performing their mandated tasks. They should have the manpower, logistics, and other resources necessary to addressing the threat of terrorism both in pro-active and reactive measures. The government must strengthen the present Anti Terrorism Council to provide strategic direction and coordinated efforts in confronting the root causes of terrorism in the country. Currently, the Anti Terrorism Task Force (ATTF) is in place as the multi-agency body to coordinate efforts between 46 agencies, yet the agency has “no power to synchronize efforts and is relegated to handling routine and administrative matters” (mid-level AFP Intelligence Officer, personal communication, April 4, 2008). The government must expand this office and establish an effective mechanism for improving intelligence sharing and the exchange of databases among the military, police and other agencies involved in all anti and counter-terrorism activities. This will enhance cooperation and avoid duplication of functions among the numerous agencies involved in defeating terrorism in the Philippines.

#### **5. Provide Strong Enforcement and Implementation of the “Human Security Act of 2007” (Philippine Anti-Terrorism Law)**

The newly approved Philippine anti-terrorism Law will provide additional means and other effective measures for various government agencies to address the terrorist threat in the country. The law will provide more authority to the military, police and other law enforcement units to monitor, detect and disrupt any groups or organizations engaged in activities related to terrorism. Agencies will be able to check, monitor and effectively disrupt the flow of funds from

international and local organizations to various terrorist groups in the Philippines. In addition, the law will provide for efficient and speedy judicial process for terrorism-related cases, particularly those still pending in courts involving top leaders of several terrorist groups in the Philippines. The new law will further offer guidelines to ensure that counter-terrorist operations respect the rule of law and human rights, and will not be used for political purposes to prosecute legal Muslim organizations and other individuals. Agencies must avoid abusing the law so that the legislation does not become a focal point of grievances from populations sympathetic to, if not supportive of, radical organizations.

#### **6. Cultivate Regional Cooperation and Exchange of Databases on Terrorism with Other Countries**

Greater international cooperation will allow efficient monitoring, tracking and disruption of terrorist personalities and organizations that have links to neighboring countries like Malaysia and Indonesia as well as other Middle East organizations. The Philippines has a dialogue with ASEAN countries and works closely with the United States and Australia, but in order to prevent the migration of problems across neighboring countries, the Philippines must enhance cooperation with its regional partners. Speedy and open communication among regional partners will allow different governmental agencies to uncover links and networks of terrorist groups with organizations that are potential sources of funding for terrorist operations.

#### **7. Implement Good Governance in all Levels of the Political System**

Graft and corruption are two of the major causes of discontent among the populace, particularly those on the lower levels of Philippine society. The lack of transparency in the political system of governance, coupled with the abuses of power by political leaders, political dynasties and other corrupt practices cause a sense of frustration that then gives rise to social movements. The Philippines should enhance or fully implement the existing mechanisms for prosecuting

corrupt government officials and political leaders ensure good governance. While the Philippines is currently working to rectify these problems at the national level, they must make efforts to implement these standards at the local level of government, where the population is most affected. Further, good governance implies fair representation of all groups governed.

#### **8. Introduce Education Programs and Regulate Islamic Schools**

Effective government education programs can counter the propaganda and recruitment efforts of radical groups. Using media and other educational means, the government can limit the ability of radical groups to propagate the use of violence. Concerned government agencies can conduct information drives and other forms of media outreach programs to counter the recruitment activities of radical groups in schools, work places, public forum and jails. Agencies can offer overseas workers going to Middle Eastern countries with awareness training and briefings on the issue of radical Islam. In addition, concerned government agencies can monitor Islamic schools to ensure that they are not propagating radical teachings in their programs. However, due to constitutional mandates, the government cannot and will not infringe upon freedom of religion in the Philippines (Secretary of National Defense (SND), personal communication, April 5, 2008). Recognizing this constraint, the challenge for the government is to find a way to prevent radical groups from using this freedom as a guise to propagate hatred (President, National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), personal communication, April 2, 2008).

#### **9. Institute a Single National ID System**

Creating a national single identification system similar to that of countries like Malaysia and Singapore will allow government agencies to have a single database of vital information about its citizens. Talks of implementing a national ID card have already risen in the Philippines (GMA News Research, 2008, p. 1). Strong opponents suggest that such a measure would be an infringement upon



civil liberties and government officials would inevitably abuse the system. On the contrary, a national ID card would require no more information than exists on driver's licenses, bank accounts, and passports. By ensuring that every Filipino receives a national ID card, government agencies would greatly enhance their ability to identify and track suspected terrorists and their related organizations. Further, the system would provide data that would increase the government's ability to create and implement policies.

The solutions described above directly counteract the key factors McAdam describes as essential for a social movement to be successful. The following table below summarizes the interaction between the recommended solution and the factors discussed in this thesis.

	Political Opportunities	Organizational Strength	Insurgent Consciousness
1. Resolution to Moro-Conflict			X
2. Inter-Agency Collaboration	X	X	
3. Re-integration Program for OFW			X
4. Strong Defense Organization	X		X
5. Anti-Terrorism Laws		X	
6. Regional Cooperation	X		
7. Good Governance	X		X
8. Regulation of Schools			X
9. ID System		X	

Table 1. Recommended solutions and their focus area of effect.

Clearly, several solutions have effects that hamper a radical movement's abilities regarding more than one factor. None of these solutions isolated from the others will remove the threat of RSIM-like organizations. Obviously, feasibility of implementation and secondary effects on the population must be further

analyzed to ensure that the solutions adopted achieve their goals without creating more opportunities or grievances on which RSIM-like groups are able to capitalize in the future.

## APPENDIX A. MAP OF THE PHILIPPINES AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



Figure 2. Map of the Philippines and Southeast Asia (From: [www.icg.org](http://www.icg.org))

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## APPENDIX B. MAP OF THE PHILIPPINES

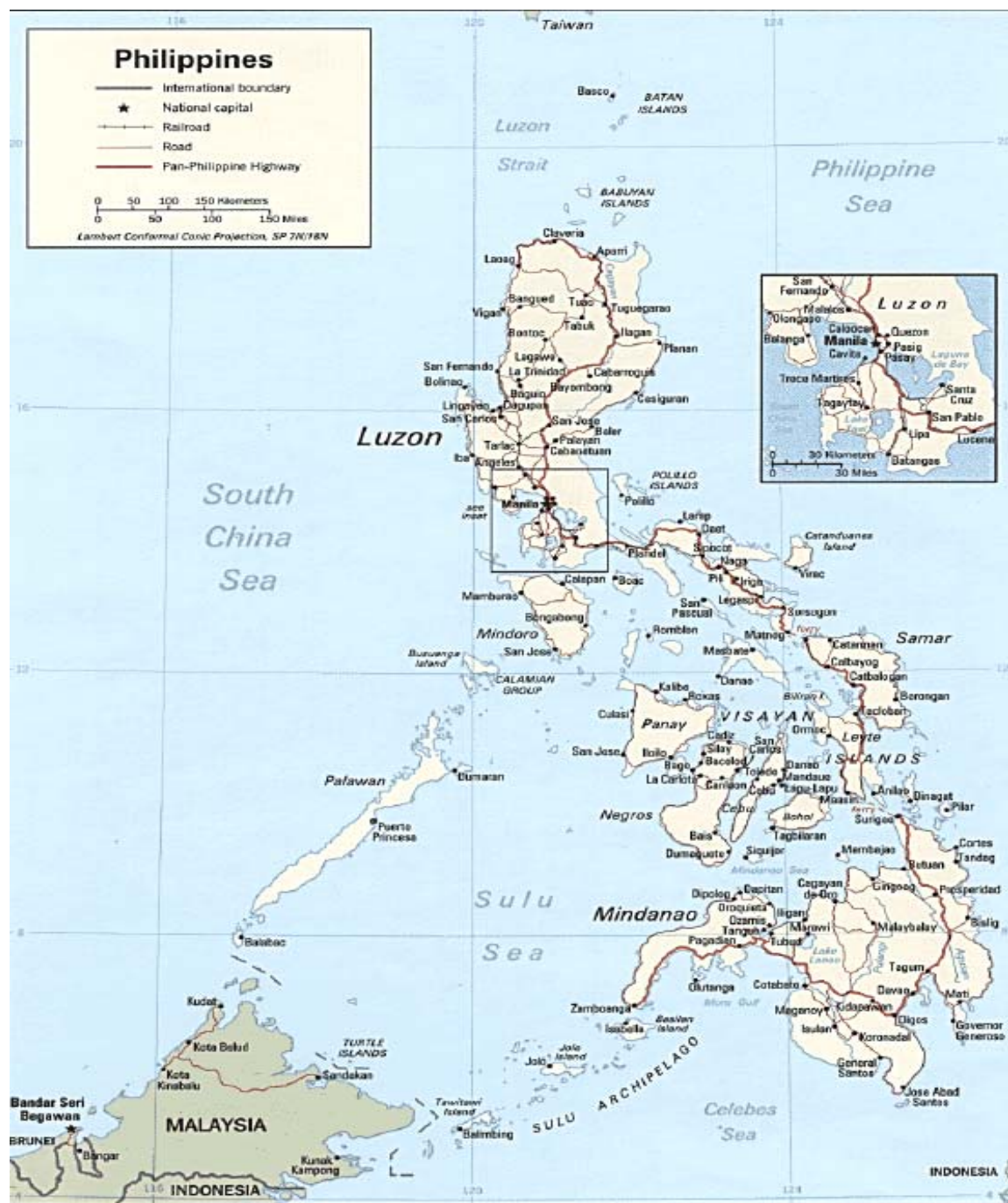


Figure 3. Map of the Philippines (From: ICG Report, 2005)

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## APPENDIX C. MAP OF MINDANAO

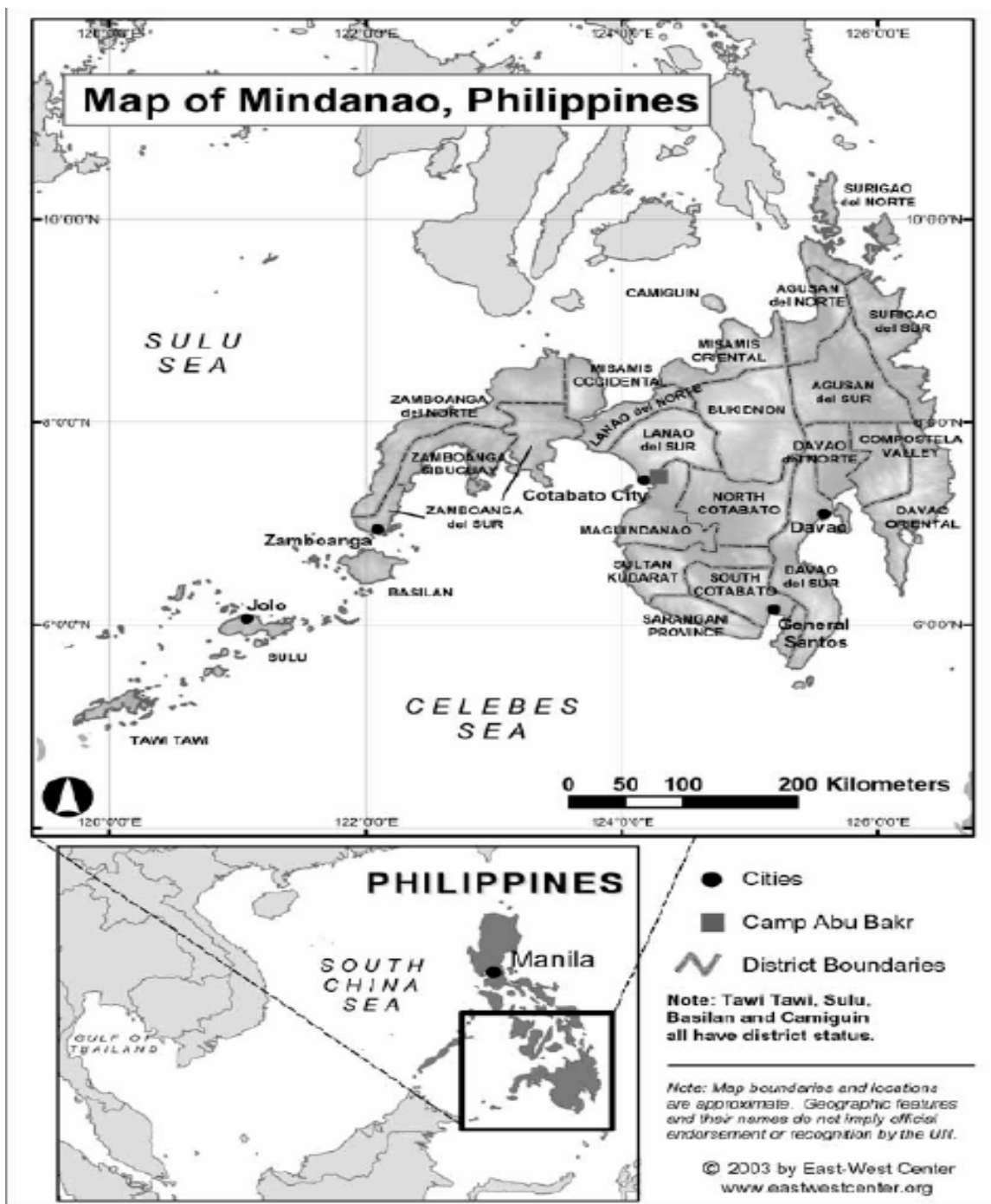


Figure 4. Map of Southern Philippines (From: Klemp, 2006)

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